

BOOK
2

寻秦记

黃易

【黃易精品】

Huang Yi

A STEP INTO
THE PAST

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A STEP INTO THE PAST

BOOK 2

(Volume six to 10)

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The Warring States of China c. 260 BCE



A STEP INTO THE PAST

By, HUANGYI

VOLUME 6

CHAPTER 1

Arriving Safely In Xianyang

[Translated by JEAN]

THE STATE OF QIN was founded on the eastern bank of the upper streams of the Qin River.

Ever since their ancestors started the kingdom, the Qins have favored taking over by strength, and were formed by

traveling nomads. They struggled to survive in this difficult land and had long drawn battles with the Barbarians. Hence, every single word in their history is written with blood and tears.

Although their ways of battling in organized nomadic groups weakened their links with the earth and making it difficult for them to settle down in a place, but it resulted in the Qin's ancestors not being restricted by boundaries and were able to continuously venture into the never trodden land in the east and battle with the barbarians.

During the time of King Zhou, one of his subject with the family name Ying was given this place because of the contribution he made by helping the Zhous rear horses for battles and he established this region near the capital. In actual fact, this is a difficult task of helping King Zhou defend his borders and preventing the barbarians from attacking.

The 400 old years of Western Zhou dynasty are the Qin's most difficult and arduous times. With sweat and blood and the countless lives of their own people, they protected their overlord, the Zhou Dynasty's western border and at the same time continued with their expansion into the west. Facing such relentless challenges and with stubborn heroism, the Qins built an extremely solid foundation.

The chance of a lifetime finally fell on the Qins.

Because of the incompetent King You, the barbarians attacked the city and the King was killed. Thus the power of the Zhou dynasty was disintegrated.

King Ping moved to the east and due to his contribution in protecting the King, the Duke of Qin was bestowed a dukedom and the Qins finally have a place to call their own.

When the states first started their wars, the weakest among the seven states was Qin. It was only when Duke Mu of Qin took over and he depended heavily on foreign advisors like Baili Xi, Jian Shu, Songsun Zhi etc, that he established a strong foundation.

The country and army really prospered due to the reforms of Duke Xiao and Shang Yang. They totally overturned the traditional setup of the tribes and established new military setups, where those who contributed militarily will be promoted and brought the power of the imperial family to its peak during their time. They also moved the Capital to Xianyang and built a majestic city with grand palaces and standardized weight measurements in the country. They divided the country into 31 provinces and abolished the borders set up in the past. The people are allowed to own their own land for farming, with the government taxing them directly.

Hence the state of Qin took a great leap and became the strongest and was feared by all the other states.

At the time when Xiang Shaolong escaped and traveled the long journey from Handan to Xianyang, the Qins were just enjoying the fruits of Shang Yang's reforms.

Xianyang is located south of Mount Jiuji and north of River Wei. Hence it's also known as Wei City.

Together with his pretty wife Wu Tingfang and leading Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and more than a thousand family warriors, Xiang Shaolong brought them into Qin and received a warm welcome from the leader of the border patrol, who quickly sent someone to report back to Xianyang and also prepared five huge ships so that they need not make the arduous journey through forests and mountains. They disembarked on the northern bank of Xianyang where Wu Yingyuan, together with the family warriors and Zhao Qian, as well as Lu Buwei's number one subordinate Tu Xian, are already waiting. The scene was magnificent.

Wu Tingfang was reunited with her father and they were both ecstatic, feeling as if they have been parted a long time; at the same time they remembered how Master Wu had committed suicide heroically and all the different emotions were mixed.

Xiao Yuetan and another youth whose dressing looks like a military advisor accompanied Tu Xian as they came forward to welcome Xiang Shaolong.

This Tu Xian is tall and thin and looks to be about 30 years of age. He's very sturdily built, tanned and nimble, his movements seems to have an air of overwhelming power and his eyes energetic. With a horse like face, he's not considered handsome but he does have a strong, manly aura and charisma.

He took a huge step forward, pulled Xiang Shaolong's sleeve and said with a long laugh, "Tu Xian is extremely lucky to be

finally able to meet such an extraordinary person whom I've admired for so long. Besides Xiang Shaolong, who else can accomplish such a historic task?"

Xiang Shaolong doesn't really know how to react to such an enthusiastic welcome and hurriedly expressed his modesty. At the same time he thought that this is the honeymoon period between Lu Buwei and the Wu family, so Tu Xian must have been instructed by Lu Buwei to take good care of them.

Tu Xian was introduced to Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo one by one and his reaction was enthusiastic and warm.

At this time Jing Jun darted out from some obscure place. After being apart for so long and now reunited, everyone were overjoyed.

Xiao Yuetan behaved as if he's an old friend and introduced that youth to Xiang Shaolong, "This is a famous man from Chu, Mister Li Si. He is now Big Master's She Ren."

She Ren means houseguest.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that the name 'Li Si' sounded extremely familiar. He suddenly remembered and exclaimed, "So it's that Mister Li Si who has the grand ambition of helping a great ruler conquer the world!"

Li Si's body trembled as he lowered his head and said, "Mister Xiang must be joking. I can't call this a grand ambition. I only hope that I can make good use of my

abilities under the leadership of Premier Lu and will be contented if I can accomplish that!"

A puzzled look flashed past Xiao Yuetan's face. He quietly thought that when he introduced Li Si as a famous man from Chu, it's just out of courtesy. The truth is Li Si is a nobody, just that he is a smooth talker and Lu Buwei has some liking for him. He had asked to follow them today so that he can witness Xiang Shaolong's glory, so why did Xiang Shaolong seem that he has long heard of this name? He can't help but ask, "Where has Shaolong heard about Mister Li?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed himself, he can't possibly tell Xiao Yuetan that he got to know about Li Si from the movie 'Emperor Qin'. He quickly changed the topic and asked, "Has Master Lu become the Premier?"

Tu Xian went to Xiang Shaolong and said with gratitude, "Master Lu has instructed me to clearly express his gratitude towards Old Master Wu, Master Yingyuan and Shaolong. If Empress Ji and Crown Prince Zheng did not return to Xianyang safely, things might have been totally different. Empress Ji and Crown Prince Zheng has been praising Shaolong in front of his Majesty and Master Lu and his Majesty is going to throw a feast for you tomorrow night so that you will have some time to rest. We'll all be one family in future."

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly to himself that this all sounds very nice but in fact they just want to trick him into becoming Lu Buwei's lackey.

He has long been sick and tired of politics and the fight for power and has no interest at all in the power struggle between the outsider Lu Buwei and the local royalty, so he secretly came to a decision.

Just looking at the Wu family's new residence in Xianyang, made up of 12 courtyards, one knows just how importantly the Qins is regarding the Wu family and the love King Zhuangxiang has towards Zhu Ji and Ying Zheng, who is actually Xiao Pan in disguise, and his trust towards Lu Buwei.

Although the new Wu residence cannot be compared to the Wu family stockade in Handan in terms of size and grandeur, but it's situated near the Palace in Xianyang in an area where all the highly ranked officials stay in. On a trotting horse, one can reach the main entrance of Xianyang Palace in a short span of time.

Xianyang is split into the inner and outer city.

The inner city is mainly made up of Xianyang Palace situated north of River Wei and Xinle Palace south of Weinan, spanning over the River Wei and is joined by a bridge about 280 steps long, forming a majestic cluster of Palaces and the scale is far greater than what the palaces in Handan or Daliang can achieve.

The two Palaces looked majestic and tall, looking as if it's almost reaching the sky, and one can imagine a ruler descending to earth from Heaven.

The outer city is more than ten times bigger than the inner city where the commoners reside in where trade is flourishing with a wide variety of goods at good prices.

When Xiang Shaolong's party went past the market east of the city, they witnessed the sale of various animal products like meat, leather, veins, horns, fats etc. There were also handmade products from ceramic, wood, metal, cloth etc. The range of products far surpassed what Zhao and Wei can offer, obviously there is a direct relation between the power of the state and its economy.

According to Tu Xian, who was traveling in the same carriage as them, the commerce in Xianyang is split into private and official commerce. The government has set up procedures and officials to look after market trading to check and encourage trade expansion. For example officials in charge of salt, metal, handicraft as well as the Minister over the Masses, Minister of Horses, Minister of Works, Minister of Cultivation etc oversees the specifications, quantity and production of the products and all these reflects the Qin's strong economic power.

On the way to the Wu family's new residence, they saw that the dressing of the people are not as bright or grand as those in Wei and Zhao but the population is even more than Daliang, and of course Handan can't even be compared to them.

It was a pleasant change for Xiang Shaolong as he secretly thought that this should be the scale of a strong country.

Most of the passersby were armed and has the air of fighters, something that Wei and Zhao cannot be a match against.

After arriving at the square in front of the Wu family's residence, Tu Xian and the rest bid their farewells and before Li Si left, he secretly indicated to Xiang Shaolong that he would like to come and visit him tomorrow morning. After Xiang Shaolong agreed wholeheartedly, Li Si left looking a little bewildered.

Everyone in the Wu residence came to the main door to welcome this group of We family heroes, especially Xiang Shaolong, who is like a star in the Wu family and idolized.

Wu Yingyuan arranged four groups of houses as temporary housing for the men as most of them will start on their journey tomorrow morning to the large farm at the outskirts north of Xianyang. Because the state of Qin is so big but under populated, therefore the scale of the farms can be even bigger than before.

It was only after Xiang Shaolong dealt with the congratulations from the clan can Chunying and the other maids were able to surround him with Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qian and bring him to his new Hidden Dragon Abode.

Ting Fangshi was unable to take the difficult journey and had fallen ill and Xiang Shaolong was so alarmed that he hurried to her room.

His love has lost much weight and her countenance pale, She fell sick partly because she was worried about Xiang

Shaolong and now that he is back, she hugged him and cried with joy. By dinnertime, she was in better spirits and was able to get down from her bed.

Looking at how happy Chunying and the other women were, Xiang Shaolong's worries were all gone as he embraced Ting Fangshi and Zhao Qian's trim waists and asked happily, "Who will accompany me tonight?"

The 2 girls blushed prettily, naturally they both would like to be with him.

Wu Tingfang said with a smile, "Why don't the three of us accompany you! I'm just afraid you won't be able to handle it."

Zhao Qian added with a giggle, "What about the other six maids? Let's see how you'll handle it?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at Chunying and the other three maids and asked bewilderedly, "How can there be 6?"

Ting Fangshi said with a smile, "You forgot about Princess Qian's Cuitong and Cuilu?"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Didn't they stay behind in Handan?"

Zhao Qian pouted, "You forgot about them! Luckily I told Master Tao to secretly bring them out amidst the chaos. They arrived in Xianyang ten days earlier than you."

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed, "Why don't you ask them to quickly see me?"

Zhao Qian called out and two pretty maids ran out from the inner hall and collapsed in front of Xiang Shaolong and started crying uncontrollably.

Xiang Shaolong felt apologetic that he has forgotten about them and felt really sorry for them. He got up and helped them to their feet and after consoling them, he went to the grand hall of the main building to have dinner with Wu Yingyuan. Tao Fang, Wu Zhuo, Teng Yi and Jing Jun were also there.

After a round of drinks and congratulatory words, Wu Yingyuan thanked him earnestly, "It's all thanks to everyone here who worked and fought together without fear of their own lives that our Wu family can have a chance to survive."

Tao Fang added, "This time we can really settle down in peace. After the Empress and the Crown Prince returned to Xianyang, Master Lu was immediately appointed as the Premier. If he makes another military contribution, he will be appointed as a Duke or Marquis and with the Wu family having such a huge backing, Old Master will be able to rest in peace in Heaven."

With the mention of Master Wu and his wives, concubines, maids and servants who chose to perish with him, everyone became somber.

Wu Yingyuan said through gritted teeth, "Premier Lu will certainly collect this blood debt for us. Supervisor Tu told me in private that the Premier already has plans to attack Zhao and hopes that Shaolong can lead it."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting. Honestly, his main enemy is Zhao Mu, the King of Zhao is at most just an accomplice. It is not his wish to lead an army to destroy the cities in Zhao and bring misfortune to the people.

He deeply felt the revulsion towards offensive wars.

There's another bigger problem. He must not become Lu Buwei's lackey no matter what, because in history, Emperor Qin was on bad terms with Lu Buwei ten years after he ascended the throne, so how can he stand on Lu Buwei's side?

But it seems that everyone in the Wu family has long regarded Lu Buwei as their new Master and looked as if they are going to live and die with him. He can't possibly tell them how history will turn out and knows there's no way he can make them believe him. This is indeed an extremely bothersome problem.

He sighed and said, "The King of Qin has appointed Master Lu as Premier, didn't the royalty and officials in Qin have any objections?"

Wu Yingyuan saw that he didn't seem very concerned that Lu Buiwei is about to hand him an important task and looked at him in puzzlement before adding, "Not only were there objections, their reactions were very vehement as well." He paused and continued "Ever since the outsider Shang Yang, the Qins have been very intense about their prejudice

against outsiders. Later, in order to deal with the Union¹ set up deal with the Qins and to avoid being attacked by the six states in the east, they had no choice but to use Zhang Yi² to deal with the Union. Later they also relied heavily on Fan Sui and used his strategy of attacking those close to them and having cordial relations with states further from them to deal with the Union of the six states. We can say that it's only when they had no other choice did they make use of talents from other states to help them.”

He sighed again and said, “But after Bai Qi forced to commit suicide by King Zhaoxiang, the Qin military were very displeased and they finally forced Fan Sui to lose his official post and the prejudice towards outsiders were reinforced again. Although we have Qin blood in us, we're still being regarded as outsiders and under Master Lu. Therefore we must help Master Lu with all our efforts, otherwise if he falls, we won't have it easy as well.”

Naturally the last few words were meant as a reminder to Xiang Shaolong.

Teng Yi and the rest remained silent. The three of them all regarded Xiang Shaolong as their leader and are only concerned about what Xiang Shaolong thinks.

¹ Union – Collection of the 6 states Qi, Chu, Yan, Zhao, Han and Wei who joined forces to fight against Qin

² Zhang Yi (張儀) (???-309 BC), born in State of Wei during the Warring States Period of China. He was an important strategist helping Qin to dissolve the unity of the other states, and hence pave the way for Qin to unify China.
[source, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhang_Yi_\(strategist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhang_Yi_(strategist))]

Tao Fang interrupted, "Master Lu's strategy now is to make military contributions first because the Qins have always favored military expansion over trade expansion. It's certain that no one will doubt Master Lu's capability in doing business and making money but on the military front, the Qins feel that he knows nothing about it. Therefore if he can make beneficial contributions in this area, his position will be as stable as Mount Tai. We must assist him more in this area."

Teng Yi asked quietly, "Who are the main people in Qin who are against Lu Buwei?"

Wu Yingyuan replied, "Mainly it's the local officials who are on Lord Yangquan's side. Because Empress Ji was once Master Lu's concubine, they suspect that the Crown Prince is not really the King's flesh and blood, therefore they are supporting the King's second son Cheng Chongqiao. This group of people are all very powerful in Qin so Master Lu is very frightened of them, even the King are not oppose them too much, therefore even though Master Lu has been appointed as the Right Premier, he has to use Lord Yangquan as the Left Premier."

Tao Fang was afraid that they might not be familiar with Lord Yangquan, so he explained further, "Lord Yangquan is the brother of King Zhaoxiang's Empress. His Majesty was able to become King because he convinced his sister to speak up for King Zhaoxiang, therefore he always regarded himself as having made the greatest contribution. Now that he is under Master Lu, naturally he is extremely peeved."

Everyone was enlightened.

King Zhaoxiang is the grandfather of Yingzheng's father, Ying Yiren who is now King Zhuangxiang. At that time Yiren's father was still Lord Anguo and did not regard Yiren highly at all because otherwise, he would not have sent him to Zhao to become a hostage.

After Lu Buwei got this 'rare treasure' Yiren, he spent a lot of money to bribe the sister of Lady Huayang, who was the favorite of Lord Anguo as well as Lord Yangquan and let them persuade Lady Huayang and King Zhaoxiang's Empress to influence Lord Anguo and King Zhaoxiang so that Yiren will stand a chance to ascend the throne.

Xiang Shaolong knows that this is not the time to convince Wu Yingyuan to be wary of Lu Buwei so he did not speak any further on this and changed the topic. After some casual talk, the feast came to an end and they all returned to their abodes to rest.

After they left the hall, with the pretext of sending him back, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo walked along with him.

Teng Yi asked quietly, "Shaolong doesn't seem to like Lu Buwei very much, is that so?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly, "Merchants only care about gains, would Brother Teng want to make friends with people like that?"

Wu Zhuo furrowed his brow, "But like what Young Master said, our fate is now tied with his. If he topples, it will be the end of us."

Xiang Shaolong really felt like telling them about Xiao Pan but he finally suppressed such an unwise thought and said with a smile, "We'll just act according to circumstances for this matter! After Lu Buwei's power has stabilized, we'll try to think of a way to cut ourselves away from him, otherwise he'll definitely pull us down. This is what I think, do not let anyone else know, even Jing Jun and Tao Fang must not know."

The two of them were already very impressed with Xiang Shaolong and seeing how he trusts them now, they both nodded their head in agreement.

After they parted ways, Xiang Shaolong returned to his new Hidden Dragon Abode.

The house was brightly lit inside and all the women were gathered in the main hall looking at Zhao Qian and Wu Tingfang play chess. Ting Fangshi has gone back to her room to rest because she has not fully recovered from her illness.

Xiang Shaolong went into the room to look in on Ting Fangshi first.

Either it's because of the effect of the surroundings or Xiang Shaolong's love, her original beauty has morphed into an alluring air of regality as she wore a pale blue robe embroidered with yellow phoenixes fit for a lady. She dolled herself up especially for him, her hair piled high up with light

make-up, she looked fresh and charming. Although she still looked a little pale, it gave her an appearance of a heartrending and fragile beauty. Under the candlelight, her pretty eyes showed her deep love for him.

Ever since the trip to Daliang, in order to deal with the Zhaos, he seldom had the chance to be alone with her like this and can't help but feel apologetic.

The laughter of the other ladies could be heard off and on coming from the hall but it did not disturb the peaceful feeling here. In fact, it added a sense of contentment, warmth and fortune.

Ting Fangshi saw him walking into the room and with an 'Ah!', she sat up happily, her pretty face came alive.

Xiang Shaolong sat on the bed and hugged this beauty who threw herself into his arms tightly, feeling her heaving bosom, filled with allure and life.

He rubbed his cheek against her soft face, looking at the snow white inner robe behind her neck, a surge of feelings came over him. Now, more than ever before, he is even more confident that he can protect the women he love.

But before he arrived at this newfound confidence, he had already experienced so many heart-breaking incidents along the way.

He thought of Zhao Ya and felt a stab of pain in his heart! He no longer felt that hatred towards her when he initially

found out that she has betrayed him. But so what? There is no way they can mend their relationship.

Does Ji Yanran who is in Wei knows that he is already here?

In this ancient era where telecommunications is difficult, it felt as if they're living on two different planets. No wonder the ancient people feels so much sadness and emotions at partings, missing somebody is indeed torturous. This is exactly why Ting Fangshi fell ill and lost weight because of love.

Now Ting Fangshi and Zhao Qian are both all alone, the only person they can rely on his him, so how can he not love them?

Maybe because being sick will make one especially vulnerable, Ting Fangshi cried and hugged him in a death grip as she cried out, "Husband! I've missed you so badly!"

Xiang Shaolong thought of Mei Canniang and a wave of sadness came over him as he hugged Ting Fangshi and fell onto the bed. He pulled her outer robe aside, revealing her heaving bosom which is still wrapped up in her white inner robe to his eyes.

A mesmerizing fragrance wafted into his nose, her ample bosom can be seen from the loosened collar.

Xiang Shaolong buried his face in her chest as his tightly wound emotions relaxed and at the same time he felt the weariness towards fights and revenge. He only hopes that he can retire to some peaceful woods in future together with Ji

Yanran and Mei Canniang as well and live a life with his loved ones that even immortals would be envious of.

In his mind an image of flowing rivers, green grass, lush woods, high mountains and clear water surfaced.

What he wants is not grand clothes and sumptuous feasts, but a life back to nature and hard work.

In this under populated world, to find a paradise on earth and start his own farm to grow some crops while his ladies will rear ducks as he fished and hunted. He'll be contented if he can live such a life until his death.

Ting Fangshi's pretty face reddened, her eyes closed tightly, her breathing heavy as she moaned daintily, totally enrapturing his soul. Obviously she is in the mood for love, which is insatiable.

Xiang Shaolong is not in the hurry to possess her. He thought of the primitive jungles they passed on the way here, there were heavy fog, thousand feet tall waterfalls and great lakes. His imagination soared and he was secretly determined that he will certainly live the rest of his life in the forests one day.

To someone from the 21st century, this type of lifestyle is the most alluring.

Ting Fangshi forced her pretty eyes to open, her fiery and sultry eyes blaming him for taking his time to join with her.

Xiang Shaolong was intoxicated in both body and mind as he forgot everything else and concentrated all his energy into her mesmerizing body.

CHAPTER 2

Dinner Feast At The Qin Palace

[Translated by JEAN]

SWEET VOICES roused him up from his deep sleep and he opened his eyes. The sun is already rising and he sat up suddenly.

The pretty Princess Zhao Qian was startled, and she said with her hand covering her smile, “The three of us have lost, we all thought that you won’t be able to get up.”

Her pretty face blushed with embarrassment as she finished her words, obviously she remembered the exciting ‘battle’ they had last night.

Xiang Shaolong was reminded of this by her and he tried flexing his body and realized that he is still feeling energetic. He laughed loudly and threw Zhao Qian onto the bed with a hug and said, "Let's do it one more time with obedient Qian'er!"

Zhao Qian tried to resist but her body went soft and she did not have the strength to get up as she moaned, "Mister Li Si from the Premier's Residence has come to look for you!"

Xiang Shaolong remembered the appointment Li Si made with him secretly yesterday and sighed. He put his hands into Zhao Qian's robes and groped around first before he got up and let his wives and pretty maids help him wash and change. He did not even have to move a finger and everything has been done for him. He was thinking of how he should get the two pretty maids Cuitong and Cuilu up the bed as well and can't help but laugh to himself that he has not changed at all in the sense that he still likes to try out new things like all men.

Li Si was waiting for him at the inner hall, looking calm, or at least that is the way he looked on the surface.

After making some small talk and Qiuying had served them tea and snacks, Li Si went straight to the point, "Where has Mister Xiang heard about my name, why do you seem so familiar about me?"

Xiang Shaolong had asked Tao Fang last night about the background of this famous official who will help Emperor Qin unite the six states in future and found out that he is Han

Fei's Junior Brother and wanted to lie and say that he heard about him from Han Fei. But he thought that there may be a day where his lie will be exposed so he gave up the idea. He smiled and asked, "Has Mister Li ever heard about such a thing called fate?"

Li Si was puzzled, "What is fate?"

It was only during the Han Dynasty that Buddhism which expounds on 'Fate' came to China, so naturally Li Si does not understand what Xiang Shaolong is saying at all.

Xiang Shaolong took a sip of hot tea before explaining, "Fate is like an invisible hand, which will inevitably join different people together no matter how different their background, how far apart they are, into friends, rulers and subordinates, or maybe husbands and wives or masters and servants. This is called fate."

Li Si looked surprised and he thought over it for a while before nodding his head, "I did not expect that not only is Mister Xiang's sword skill famous in the world, your ideas are thought provoking as well. I just wonder what has this got to do with Mister knowing about me?"

Xiang Shaolong replied nonchalantly, "It's very difficult to explain what fate is. Although it's the first time I met you, it feels as if I have long known about your aspirations so I just

blurted those words out. Or maybe it's because I have heard of Brother Li's tutelage under Xun Zi³!"

Li Si furrowed his brows. Although he is Xun Zi's disciple, their philosophies are far apart. He was about to speak further when Xiang Shaolong changed the subject, "What are your views on ruling a country?"

Li Si was stunned for a moment. If it was King Zhuangxiang who was asking him this question, he'll certainly be pouring out his views. But not only does Xiang Shaolong not have an official post, he is also under Lu Buwei's faction. If he were to speak so closely to his heart to someone he has just made an acquaintance of and revealed all that he knows, he may get into trouble. He can't help but hesitate.

After he came to Xianyang, although he had a few in depth talks with Lu Buwei and Lu Buwei has also expressed his admiration towards him, but he can tell that not only is Lu Buwei extremely ambitious but overbearing as well and will get into trouble sooner or later. Besides, he was feeling secretly bothered as their views on ruling a country is vastly

³ Xun Zi (simplified Chinese, 荀子; traditional Chinese, 荀子; pinyin, Xún Zǐ; Wade-Giles, Hsün Tzu, ca. 312–230 BC) was a Chinese Confucian philosopher who lived during the Warring States Period and contributed to one of the Hundred Schools of Thought. Xun Zi believed man's inborn tendencies need to be curbed through education and ritual, counter to Mencius's view that man is innately good. He believed that ethical norms had been invented to rectify mankind.

Educated in the state of Qi, Xun Zi was associated with the Confucian school, but his philosophy has a pragmatic flavour compared to Confucian optimism. Some scholars attribute it to the divisive times.

Xunzi was one of the most sophisticated thinkers of his time, and was the teacher of Li Si and Han Fei Zi.

[source, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xun_Zi]

different from each other so it'll be very difficult for him to be recognized or entrusted with heavy responsibility.

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "Mister does not want to be just a small fry whom no one bothers!"

Ji Si was startled and hurriedly said, "Mister Xiang must be joking!"

Xiang Shaolong said with a straight face, "In order to accomplish great things, then one must take great risks. If Mister cannot put aside your fears for your life, then our conversation today will end here and we will not breath a word about this to anyone else in future, how about it?"

Li Si looked at him intensely for a moment, and felt that Xiang Shaolong shows a sincerity that can move others. He felt a burning passion in his heart as he threw all caution to the wind and said, "I wonder what views and suggestion Mister Xiang has?"

Xiang Shaolong asked, "In Mister Li's opinion, how does the future bode for Premier Lu?"

Li Si's expression changed slightly as he exhaled a long breath and said with a sigh, "Mister Xiang is making it difficult for me."

Xiang Shaolong understands the difficult position he is in and asked gently, "What work is Mister Li doing now in the Lu Residence?"

Li Si replied frankly, "I am helping Premier Lu write his 'Lu Chronicles' according to his instructions. The Premier hopes

that with this book he can come up with a complete philosophy and reforms for ruling the country. Hei! I am just one of his many subordinates, the word 'helping' is a bit of an exaggeration."

Xiang Shaolong is not a historian and this is the first time he has heard about this and asked in puzzlement, "So there's actually such a happening. I wonder what are the new ideas on ruling a country in the book?"

A look of disdain appeared slightly on Li Si's face as he said calmly, "What kind of new ideas can he have? It's mainly a collection of the essence of the philosophies of others before, who supports the idea of 'Divinity of Heaven', which means that one can only rule the world well if he follows the natural order of heaven and earth. The ruler and subjects will walk their own path and not interfere with one another. A ruler should rule the country with benevolence and reflect on himself from time to time, seeking virtuosity constantly until in the end, the ideal state of having nothing to govern is achieved."

Xiang Shaolong saw that he was clear on his reasoning and was secretly impressed and asked gently, "Does Mister think that Premier's ideals will work?"

Li Si dare not reply him at all and asked instead, "What does Mister Xiang think?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that if he doesn't show off a little, he will be looked down upon by this learned, ambitious and younger man, so he said coolly, "Premier Lu is governing the

Qin politics as a Han, and places more trust on people from Zhao, Wei and Han. The Empress who was his companion is from Zhao as well. On top of that, ever since Shang Yang's reforms, Qin has been using legalism and militarism to govern the country, which is a polar opposite of Premier Lu's ideals. There is no where the two can blend at all and as for what will happen in future, I hope that Mister can advise me."

Li Si slapped the table and stood up, saying, "With such a talent like Mister Xiang in Qin, I should return to my hometown and be a farmer instead."

Xiang Shaolong grabbed his arm and pulled him back onto the chair and said earnestly, "Mister is exaggerating. Firstly I know nothing at all about ruling a country but most importantly I have no interest in an official career. Everything that I have done in the past is for survival and not fame. There will come a day when I will retire to the woods and not bother myself with worldly affairs. Whether Qin can unify the six states will have to depend on you."

Li Si was momentarily stunned and secretly thought that these words would be more appropriate if King Zhuangxiang told it to him. Although King Zhuangxiang was impressed with Xiang Shaolong, he is not a wise ruler at all and follows Lu Buwei's advice on everything. With the current situation, who else can outsiders like them rely on other than Lu Buwei? But Xiang Shaolong seems to imply that there is a new leader, which is really incomprehensible to him.

Xiang Shaolong put his hand on his shoulder and said with a smile, "Mister Li will understand my words in future, just rest assured and stay in Xianyang! This is the only place you can expand your ambition."

After Li Si bid his farewell, Xiang Shaolong went to look for Teng Yi for breakfast.

During the meal Teng Yi asked, "What are your plans for the future?"

Naturally Xiang Shaolong will have his plans, which is based on the information he gathered from the movie 'Emperor Qin'. Help set a solid foundation for the fake Yingzheng, Xiao Pan, so that he can handle Lu Buwei's attempt to wrestle power in future and the appearances of evil officials.

Now that he has found Li Si, there is still the father and son Wang Jiang and Wang Bi. They are all famed generals who will help Emperor Qin unite the world in future. With these three helping Xiao Pan, he can retire to the woods in peace.

He gave a relaxed sigh as he sat back on the chair and stretched, "To tell the truth, I have no great ambitions at all. After I kill Zhao Mu, I will move to one of the Wu family's farm far away and live a secluded life. I'll be contented with hunting or fishing during my free time."

Teng Yi revealed a small trace of a rare smile and said nonchalantly, "If you can do that, I'll go hunting with you."

At this time Jing Jun rushed in like a gust of wind and said energetically, "Come! Let me be the guide and show you two big brothers the glorious sights of Xianyang."

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, "Whom have you been making hanging out with recently?"

Jing Jun sat down on the rug opposite them and replied excitedly, "Of course it's the people from the Premier's residence. It's so exciting here, there are fights and injuries everyday. Just a few days ago some swordsmen from the Premier's residence were ambushed in the largest officials brother in Xianyang, with three dead and seven injured. Those thieves who made the sneak attack were lucky that I was away at the temple north of river Wei to peek at those ladies offering prayers. Otherwise, there won't be so many dead and injured."

Xiang Shaolong and Tengyi exchanged looks, both secretly alarmed. This lad is young and rash and may cause trouble.

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, "Don't the Qins value law and legalism? How can there be fights?"

Teng Ji replied smugly, "Now Xianyang is in a mess, who can be bothered to interfere. Especially when it involves the people of the Left and Right Premier's residences, no one dares to intervene."

Xiang Shaolong said sternly, "You better not cause any trouble these few days. Once we are clear about the situation, we'll go back to Zhao immediately to deal with Zhao Mu, understand?"

Jing Jun was ecstatic and bowed respectfully, "Xiao Jun understands. Great! I can get Zhao Zhi back here."

Teng Yi reprimanded in a low voice, "You are getting more and more ridiculous!"

Jing Jun fears Teng Yi the most and was so frightened he immediately bowed down and dared not make a sound.

Teng Yi sighed and said to Xiang Shaolong, "Shaolong! This lad is still young and doesn't understand the severity of the situation. I will take him in hand, you don't have to worry."

Xiang Shaolong said with a laugh, "Why would I blame him?"

Jing Jun said, "Xiao Jun respects both brothers the most!"

Teng Yi shouted, "Shut up!" He made an eye signal at Xiang Shaolong, signifying that he wants to reprimand Jing Jun in private.

Xiang Shaolong understood his meaning and went back to Hidden Dragon Abode alone. He has not even stepped through the door when he heard the cheers and laughs of the ladies near the well. He hurried over for a look and it turned out that his wives and maids have all changed into light and short dresses and happily playing ball while Ting Fangshi sat at a side and watched with a smile.

Chunying and Xiaying rushed forward and dragged him into the game.

This day was therefore spent amidst such happy atmosphere. At dusk, Wu Yingyuan asked someone to invite

him over so that they can go to the Palace together for the feast.

When he thought of how he will soon be meeting this famous Lu Buwei who can affect the history of the warring states, Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel a little nervous.

How could he have expected that just a fight at 'Black Leopard Bar' can totally change his fate!

The horse carriage drove slowly into the grand entrance, past a round shaped corridor, into the square in front of the main hall.

There were rest areas for soldiers on both sides of the main door, where there are two camps of troops under the command of the Military Official. After some routine questionings, they allowed the 12 riders who were protecting Xiang and Wu's carriages into the inner palace.

Although Xianyang Palace is a few times larger, its layout is the same as the Zhao Palace where it's 'front court back rest' format. The outer part is where the King of Qin deal with state matters and hold court, the inner part is where the King and his concubines and children's bedrooms are.

The three main halls in the front part looked grand and majestic, the Premier Hall and various departments are on each side; the inner part consisted mainly of the King of Qin and the Empress's three back palaces, and on the right and left side there are the six Eastern Palaces and six Western Palaces, where the Empress Dowager, Concubines and various Princes reside in.

Xiang Shaolong was sightseeing along the way and saw halls, courtyards, woods, pavilions, platforms, corridors etc, which looked solemn yet respectable, something that the Zhao Palace cannot be compared to.

The construction of the buildings at the inner court is even more diversified and the layout compact with groups of buildings surrounding a courtyard with walls surrounding them and the different sections separated by tall walls. If there's no one to lead the way, being lost is no big surprise.

Once he thought that Xiao Pan will one day become the master of this place, and he was the one who single-handedly facilitated all this, Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel pride and a sense of achievement.

King Zhuangxiang's feast is held at the 'Health Cultivating Palace' at the back, which is also the inner Palace's most grand wooden building, a three storey tall building. On the tall platform there are two pavilion looking buildings and on each side of these buildings and the lower platform there are each ten rooms of different sizes. There are bedrooms, rest areas, bathrooms etc which are connected by corridors. There are drawings on the walls and the steps on the corridors are carved with dragons and phoenixes, and the whole place looked grand and magnificent.

The horse carriage stopped at the square and Lu Buwei had specifically told his housekeeper Mister Tu to welcome them there. Naturally he was especially happy and courteous when he saw them.

As they walked up the long steps, Tu Xian said in a low voice, "Besides Premier Lu, Lord Yangquan is also here tonight. This person thinks that he has made a great contribution to his Majesty in the past and is extremely proud and overbearing. Even his Majesty and Premier Lu have to give in to him a little, the two of you will have to handle him carefully."

Wu Yingyuan saw how forthright he was towards them, obviously he is regarding them as family and was secretly overjoyed as he kept on agreeing.

Xiang Shaolong thought that there will come a day when they have to oppose Lu Buwei and was secretly sighing instead.

Maybe this is the pain one has to suffer for knowing the future and he can't help but feel all the more determined to retire away from the world.

They had just stepped into the door when they heard a long laugh and saw a grandly dressed man whose body shape and limbs are a lot more stout than others striding towards them. He was wearing a tall hat with feathers and ornaments on it and the feathers flapped as he walked, boosting the power he exuded.

This person is about 40 years old with a square face and big ears. He looks a little unique, and his eyes a little too thin and long but shining, giving others the impression that he is profound and formidable.

Wu Yingyuan hurriedly pulled Xiang Shaolong to kneel and pay his respects, crying out Premier Lu.

Before they were on their knees, Lu Buwei has already dashed forward to help them up, his lighted eyes landed on Xiang Shaolong as he exclaimed in surprise, “No wonder Empress Ji and Mister Xiao kept complimenting Xiang Shaolong. I, Lu Buwei, have traveled the world and it’s the first time I’ve seen such a talent like Shaolong.”

His loud booming voice reverberated in the hall.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Lu Buwei is only a little shorter than him but his aura is intense. He was secretly impressed and hurriedly said humbly, “Premier, you flatter me!”

He sneaked a peek and saw that besides the three tables at the top level, there are two other tables each on the left and right side of the hall and next to each table stood two palace maids. He heaved a sigh of relief as he need not handle so many people and was naturally a lot more relaxed.

Lu Buwei did not put on the airs of a Premier at all as his left and right hand grabbed theirs and pulled them towards the table on the right at the top level as he said quietly in Xiang Shaolong’s ears, “I was just worrying that I have the army but no general and it’s good that Shaolong is here, I no longer have to worry I won’t accomplish great things.” And he chortled.

Wu Yingyuan who was on the other side said happily, “We will have to depend on Premier to promote us.”

However Xiang Shaolong is secretly lamenting. Man have feelings and with Lu Buwei having such high regard for him,

how will he be able to extract himself from all these and retire to a life in the farm?

At this time three people came to their table and Lu Buwei waved his hand and dismissed the maids first before saying in a low voice, "I have already arranged with his Majesty to let Shaolong become the Vice-General to General Meng Ao. General Meng is originally from the state of Qi but has always been ostracized by the local generals ever since he came to Qin. He was depressed that he was unable to use his abilities. In fact his military strategies are something no one in Qin can compare with and if he has Shaolong's help and make great military contributions, I will certainly reward both of you well."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Lu Buwei is formidable to use such a method to pull him over to his side, direct and forceful, how can anyone not work for him wholeheartedly. He pretended to be touched before saying, "Premier regards Shaolong so highly, I am willing to die for you with no hesitation at all. The problem is Shaolong's greatest enemy Zhao Mu is still living. As long as I am unable to tear that fiend to pieces, it's difficult for me to put my mind on other matters."

Lu Buwei grabbed his arm tightly as his eyes flashed and said, "I can't wait to skin him and break his bones as well. Shaolong just go ahead and do whatever you want, I will support you in everything. After you get his head, remember to bring it back to Xianyang so that his Majesty and I can have a look at it!"

It's only now that Xiang Shaolong fully have a taste of Lu Buwei's formidability. No wonder he can become the Right Premier of the strongest state in the world although he is only a merchant.

Also, he could deduce with just those few words he said that he was planning to sneak back into Handan to assassinate Zhao Mu. From this it can be seen how quickly and astutely his mind works.

The Door Official cried out, "General Meng Ao arrives!"

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to blurt out, 'To speak of Cao Cao and here he comes'⁴, luckily he remembered that Cao Cao has not been born yet and hurriedly kept his words.

Lu Buwei turned around and said with a loud laugh, "What can be happier than meeting an old friend?"

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Yingyuan looked towards the front door and saw a tall and skinny man dressed in brocade robes and striding into the hall with big steps, bowing with respect from far away as he said, "Meng Ao pays his respect to Premier Lu!"

With his unique way of walking, Lu Buwei stepped forward and put his arms around Meng Ao warmly and walked towards Wu and Xiang.

This Meng Ao has a longish face, about 40 old years old, tanned with a weather beaten face. His brows looked as if they are frequently furrowed but his eyes are alert, which

⁴ Chinese idiom – similar meaning to speak of the devil

gives others the feeling that he is extraordinary. His body is very healthy and nimble, obviously he could maintain this top form due to the amount of exercise he gets.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Lu Buwei has an eye for talent, therefore this Meng Ao is definitely a man of ability.

Meng Ao and Wu Yingyuan are already acquainted with each other and after exchanging greetings, his sharp eyes landed on Xiang Shaolong's face.

Xiang Shaolong did not want to exchange looks with him so he hurriedly bowed to show his respect.

Lu Buwei introduced the both of them.

Meng Ao obviously doesn't really know how to socialize, his tense face has no smile at all as he said a little stiffly, "Glad to meet you!"

Wu Yingyuan laughed, "That lad Jing Jun has just been here for a few days but has already made friends with General Meng Ao's sons and they have been going to the outskirts to hunt and have fun!"

Lu Buwei complimented, "That lad is indeed skilled. He's only been in Xianyang for such a short time but he has already defeated three famous local swordsmen. However he concedes to no one except Shaolong, making all of us itch to witness Shaolong's ultimate swordplay."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong realize that Jing Jun has been doing all these things and he doesn't know whether to be

happy or worried. It seems that for the time being he has no choice but to stand on Lu Buwei's side.

Meng Ao heard his sons being mentioned and revealed a trace of a rare smile and said, "Let's see when Shaolong is free, please come to my house. Xiaowu and Xiaotian both idolize Shaolong a lot!"

Before Xiang Shaolong has a chance to answer, the Door Official cried out again, "Left Premier Lord Yangquan, Great General Wang He arrives!"

Meng Ao's smile immediately disappeared while Lu Buwei gave a cold snort. It seems that the battle between the new and old, outsiders and locals have reached a stage when they don't even try to appear cordial.

Xiang Shaolong looked towards the main door and saw a short, fat man wearing a grand robe together with a big and stout man wearing battle robes walking over with large steps and heads held high.

The Qin's style is really different from the Zhaos. There are no family warriors surrounding them or a band welcoming them. Everything is simpler and this made Xiang Shaolong more relaxed.

Xiang Shaolong secretly found it funny that both Lu Buwei the Right Premier and Lord Yangquan the Left Premier brought with them a general to the feast and this is obviously not a coincidence but an arrangement by the King of Qin to ensure that the power on both sides are balanced.

But this Wang He is an important pillar in Qin while Meng Ao is an unsuccessful general. Obviously Lu Buwei has not gotten the support of the Qin military and this can be his fatal weakness, which is why he is trying so hard to get Xiang Shaolong on his side. Otherwise this materialistic merchant will not be bothered to take even a look at him.

Lord Yangquan and Wang He's gaze fell onto Xiang Shaolong. Xiang Shaolong and Wu Yingyuan hurriedly bowed to show their respect.

Wang He is very magnanimous and smiled in return.

Lord Yangquan looked proud and nodded slightly as he squinted his evil looking eyes surrounded by flesh and said with as cold laugh, "How many days have Commander Xiang been here! If I did not come and attend this feast today, I'm afraid I still wan't be able to see you in your glory!"

These words were obviously blaming Xiang Shaolong for not visiting an important person like him after he arrived in Xianyang.

Wu Yingyuan was secretly cursing but on the surface he smiled and said, "My foolish son-in-law arrived only yesterday and I hope Lord Yangquan can be magnanimous about his lapse and not take it to heart."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved instead. This Lord Yangqun's moods are reflected so clearly on his face and he is quite ordinary, definitely not Lu Buwei's match. Instead it is Wang He who is more formidable.

“Dang!”

A sound was heard.

18 stout and broad warriors with long spears came into the hall from the back hall in neat lines and stood on both sides.

Next, sounds of close footsteps coming down the stairs could be heard from behind the hall.

Xiang Shaolong then realized that King Zhuangxiang had been in the hall upstairs all along and only came down to host the feast when he was informed that all the guests have arrived.

At the same time he guessed that Lu Buwei was upstairs earlier in a secret discussion with King Zhuangxiang and from this one can see how close their relationship is.

Everyone split into two sides and knelt to welcome the arrival of King Zhuangxiang.

Firstly four guards with serious expressions stepped out, followed by eight pretty young palace maids. They are dressed mainly in purple, with red and blue sleeves, which looked a little dowdy as compared to the embroidered and grand dresses of the palace maids in Zhao and Wei.

They were split into two groups, with two men and four women in each group, standing in two straight lines looking very serious.

The sounds of accessories clanking could be heard.

A pretty lady with the bearing of royalty and wearing long robes holding the hand of a splendidly dressed child about ten years of age walked in slowly.

Xiaong Shaolong peeked and thought that it was Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan but upon close look, he realized his mistake.

At this time the servant cried out, “Lady Xiuli, Prince Cheng Chongqiao arrives!”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, so this is the prince that Lord Yangquan is supporting. That lady’s beauty is extraordinary, she should be a concubine that King Zhuangxiang appointed after his return to Qin from Handan. For her and her son to be able to attend this feast, it means that she has the ability to vie with Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan. Obviously King Zhuangxiang is smitten with her too, otherwise she would have been banished to the cold palace.

The sounds of accessories can be heard again and Xiang Shaolong’s eyes brightened immediately.

Zhu Ji was in a short dress with gold embroidered floral patterns which dazzled, with another floor length long dress beneath. Together with her coiffed hair, she walked lightly like a willow tree swaying in the breeze, showing off her slender waist, lush bottom and natural allure. Immediately she wins that Lady Xiuli hands down.

With one hand holding her dress and the other holding Xiao Pan, who is dressed mainly in black, she looked especially enchanting.

Xiang Shaolong remembered how he had once held her under the bedcovers and talked, that was another experience altogether. He lowered his head to avoid eye contact with her.

The servant announced, "Empress Ji, Crown Prince Zheng arrives."

Two pairs of mother and son came to the side of the tables and knelt down to await the arrival of King Zhuangxiang.

Xiao Pan's eyes did not shift, not even taking a single look at Xiang Shaolong at all.

Xiang Shaolong secretly complimented him. He had in the past instructed Xiao Pan not to treat him any differently, otherwise it may arouse the suspicions of Zhu Ji or other people.

The four guards cried out in unison, "His Majesty arrives!"

Xiang Shaolong dared not peek any longer and can only try to imagine what he could have looked like.

A gentle, melodious and calm voice rang out in front, "Everyone, rise!"

Everyone cried out in unison, "Thank you, Your Majesty!"

Xiang Shaolong rose together with everyone else and lifted his head for a look, and coincidentally came eye to eye with King Zhuangxiang who was observing him.

This King of Qin who was once held hostage in Handan is about 40 years old, tall and thin, and seems to look a little

like a Taoist. His skin is as fair as a lady, his face pale but has a rare scholarly charisma with long, slender fingers. He gives others a feeling that he is from a good family background with the air of someone from a large family. A pity that his eyes doesn't seem alert enough, otherwise he would have outstanding magnetism.

He was wearing a long square board on the top of his head that made him look even more impressive as a ruler.

Naturally he was wearing a ruler's robes, with a black base and yellow patterns with gold edges, looking solemn and grand.

He saw that Xiang Shaolong is far better than other people in terms of body size and spirit, King Zhuangxiang's eyes lit up and the corners of his lips revealed a trace of a gentle smile as he said softly, "Only an extraordinary person can accomplish extraordinary things. Shaolong, you have not disappointed me."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect King Zhuangxiang to address him directly by his name and in such a friendly tone as well, and he hurriedly expressed his thanks.

King Zhuangxiang's eyes fell on Wu Yingyuan and he said gently, "To have such a son-in-law, what more can Mister Wu ask for. It is predictable that the Wu family will have great glory in future because of Shaolong."

Wu Yingyuan expressed his thanks happily.

Lord Yangquan and Wang He exchanged a look, both can see the unhappiness in the other's eyes.

King Zhuangxiang looked at everyone and said calmly, "Everyone be seated!"

The drum sounded again.

Another 18 guards walked out from inside and together with the previous guards, formed into teams of nine and they went to their positions behind the tables and stood guard.

Everyone went to stand next to the tables and waited for King Zhuangxiang to be seated, the guards to take their positions and Ladies Xiuli, Zhu Ji and their sons were seated before they dared to sit down.

On the two tables on the right, at the upper level, was where Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong was seated, followed by Meng Ao and Wu Yingyuan; on the other side it was entirely different with Lord Yangquan and Wang He each taking a table.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately did not look at Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan to prevent King Zhuangxiang or the others from realizing that he has a special relationship with the 'mother and son'. This is what is called, 'Rather be suspected than to prove suspicions correct.'

The palace maids were like butterflies flitting amongst flowers as they served the guests wine and delicacies.

King Zhuangxiang said, "Now that Empress Ji and Crown Prince Zheng has returned to Xianyang safely, I no longer have any worries. Let us have a toast!"

Everyone raised their cups but Lady Xiuli, Lord Yangquan and Wang He's expressions naturally looked a little uneasy.

King Zhuangxiang's eyes landed on where Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan were seated and his gaze became even more gentle and with his melodious voice full of feelings, he said, "My Prince Zheng, Shaolong is your benefactor, aren't you offering a toast to Mister Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong can't help but be charmed by him and he truly felt that his success is not based on luck. King Zhuangxiang was acknowledged by Lu Buwei as a 'rare treasure' while he was down and out and later he was able to move Lady Huayang, who was King Zhaoxiang's favorite then, and she made him her son. In the end he won and became the successor to the throne and all these can be accomplished because of his unique charm. Otherwise, no matter how much money Lu Buwei spends on bribing, it would just be a waste of effort.

Xiao Pan stood up on hearing that and walked to Xiang Shaolong's table.

It's only at this time that the two of them had the opportunity to meet eye to eye.

Xiao Pan's eyes reddened immediately, full of feelings, but luckily he quickly hid what he felt.

Naturally palace maids came up to help pour the wine.

Xiang Shaolong stood up, bowed respectfully with his hands held above his head as he received the fine wine Xiao Pan handed him and drank it in one gulp.

Xiao Pan has grown more stout, his expression calm. When Xiang Shaolong thought of how he will grandly unite the world in future, he can't help but feel his heart tremble.

The two of them went back to their respective seats.

Xiang Shaolong can't help but take another look at Xiao Pan and realized Zhu Ji was looking at him with a smile, her eyes gentle and he was so shocked he quickly lowered his eyes.

After chatting with everyone for a while, King Zhuangxiang's gaze settled on Xiang Shaolong again and he asked calmly, "If we were to attack Handan, destroy Zhao and capture Zhao Mu alive, how much troops does Shaolong think will be needed?"

Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan's eyes lit up at the same time.

Lord Yangquan and Wang He listened intently, waiting to hear his response.

Lu Buwei laughed loudly and said, "Shaolong be brave and speak your mind!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled a little and replied, "With the current situation, we'll only need 20,000 men to attack Handan but to destroy Zhao, even if everyone in Qin were put to work, it's still impossible."

Everyone was shocked.

Lord Yangquan said with a cold laugh, "It's only been a short time that Commander Xiang is exposed to military warfare, that's why he expressed such ignorant comments. Would Great General Wang explain these to Commander Xiang so that he won't continue with his wrong understanding unknowingly."

He still insisted on addressing him as Commander to remind others that he is just an insignificant and lowly ranked commander, and also to show that he still regards him as an outsider.

King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei's expressions were initially unhappy upon hearing Xiang Shaolong's words, then they thought deeper into it.

Zhu Ji on the other hand was smiling slightly, full of confidence in Xiang Shaolong.

Whereas Wu Yingyuan kept making eyes at Xiang Shaolong, hoping that he'll be careful in his words.

Meng Ao's eyes lit up, obviously he understood the meaning behind Xiang Shaolong's words.

Xiang Shaolong looked at Wang He calmly, his eyes shining intensely.

Wang He felt his heart turn cold upon his gaze and became more cautious as he said, "I'd like to ask Mister Xiang to explain why he would have such a stand."

Once he said that, King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei, Wu Yingyuan and Lord Yangquan, these four men who has no knowledge of military affairs immediately knew that Xiang Shaolong was not speaking nonsense, otherwise Wang He would not show such hesitation.

Xiang Shaolong smiled calmly and said, "After Changping, Zhao indeed suffered great damage and not only was military morale affected, it also greatly affected the confidence of the royalty and officials in the country. But it's exactly because of this attitude that developed the determination of everyone to defend against the enemy to the death. The defeat of the Yans is proof of that. My suggestion of using 20,000 men to attack Handan is to make use of the opportunity that our Wu family had just evacuated from Zhao and all the beasts in the farms had been poisoned and died. The Zhaos, in this aspect, will be at a loss for now and adding on to the fact that their morale has been beaten, I have the confidence of winning. But this must be a quick battle and take the opportunity that Li Mu and Lian Po are still engaged with the Xiong Nus and Yans so they will be unable to extricate themselves for the time being. We will attack the city and then retreat, for that place is not suitable for a long stay."

He continued somberly, "If we're just going to attack the city, we need only 10,000 men but if we want a quick battle with minimal casualties, we will definitely need 20,000 men."

Wang He was stunned for a moment before saying with a sign, "What Mister Xiang has said is not without reason."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but like him even more, because he is not someone who will lie thru his teeth.

Meng Ao said solemnly, "I totally agree with Shaolong's words."

Lord Yangquan was so furious that his face was alternating between being fiery red and deathly pale and after exchanging glances with Lady Xiuli, he was at a loss for words.

Zhu Ji laughed delicately and addressed King Zhuangxiang with a flirtatious look, "Your Majesty! I didn't recommend the wrong person! It's the first time the Great General and General Meng shares the same agreement on any matter!"

Once she said that, both Wang He and Meng Ao started feeling embarrassed.

Xiao Pan looked at Xiang Shaolong, feelings of admiration and longing welled up in him.

King Zhuangxiang took a look at Lu Buwei first before he continued smoothly, "Then can Shaolong explain why you said that we will not be able to destroy Zhao even if we use all out resources?"

Wu Yingyuan is the most nervous now. If Xiang Shaolong cannot convince the King of Qin on this matter, that whatever little advantage they gained earlier would be gone as well.

Xiang Shaolong explained, "Although it is said the most important thing in a war is the country's strength and military power, but relationships with external parties and information is equally important. As the saying goes, the battle is won if one knows the enemy as well as one knows oneself."

Lord Yangquan interrupted, "The Great Qin has never overlooked these two aspects. The late King appointed Zhang Yi as Premier and this took care of external relationships and destroyed the unification plans of the six states. As for information, we send spies regularly to the various states and have never slackened in this area."

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to despise this senior statesman and asked impolitely, "Can I ask you then, if we were to attack Zhao with all our military resources, what will the reaction of the other states be?"

Lord Yangquan was dumbfounded, because if he does not have the support of actual information, how is he able to answer such a hypothetical question.

Lu Buwei patted Xiang Shaolong's thigh beneath the table to show his happiness that he has managed to put Lord Yangquan down.

Wang He is after all on the same boat as Lord Yangquan so he said, "Indeed this matter cannot be rushed. Let's not talk about Qi and Chu for now, but the other three states depend on one another for survival and they will certainly unite and fight against us. Any single one of the states do not have the

strength to fight against our Great Qin's thousands of men but if they were to join forces, it'll be a different matter altogether."

By saying this, not only has he helped to intercede for Lord Yangquan, it also meant that he has affirmed Xiang Shaolong's explanation.

Xiang Shaolong did not allow them to have a chance to take a break and hurriedly added, "If Zhao is under attack, the other states will not just sit and watch. Even if at the beginning they have the intention viewing the fight of two tigers while sitting on a mountain, waiting to sweep in once both sides are injured, but once the Zhaos close their Pass to defend themselves from inside and at the same time send troops to cut off our reinforcements paths, the other states will send troops to help sooner or later. By then we will be surrounded by enemies and the situation is not optimistic."

King Zhuangxiang slapped the table and exclaimed, "What a good description 'viewing the fight of two tigers while sitting on a mountain', it's the first time I've heard of such an interesting verse."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought to himself, could it be that this verse has not been used during this era yet? After thanking King Zhuangxiang for his compliment, he continued, "Besides, Lord Xinling of Wei is still around and he can influence the other states. If they join forces again, we'll be in even greater danger."

Everyone went silent. eight years ago, Lord Xinling from Wei, together with the troops from the other states, defeated the Qin army badly at Handan. Everyone still remembered the events as if it just happened and were apprehensive.

King Zhuangxiang sighed, "Then would it mean that we'll just let the fiend Zhao Mu go off scot-free?"

Just with that sentence, he knows that King Zhuangxiang does not have the grand ambition of unifying the world, or else he would have said 'how do we conquer the six states?' instead.

Xiang Shaolong replied with a straight face, "If the intention is just to capture Zhao Mu, your Majesty need not use a single soldier at all, just leave it all to me."

Everyone was stunned.

King Zhuangxiang's spirits rose as he asked, "Is this a boast?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Not a boast at all. I only need half a year to gather information, then I can set off and capture Zhao Mu back alive and kicking to your Majesty and you can do anything you want with him. But most importantly this must be kept a secret, otherwise I'm afraid I won't be able to come back alive."

King Zhuangxiang slapped the table and cried out, "Whoever dares to reveal this matter will be executed immediately with no excuse!"

At the same time Lu Buwei sighed next to Xiang Shaolong's ears, "How can you say that out?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he's worried that Lord Yangquan will try to harm him and he put his hand under the table and wrote on his thigh the word 'fake'. Lu Buwei immediately understood his meaning and looked at him with admiration and approval.

Lord Yangquan lowered his head so that others will not be able to see his happy expression.

Zhu Ji laughed coquettishly and teased King Zhuangxiang, "Zhao Mu alive and kicking, Shaolong really has some interesting phrases. Is your Majesty still in doubt about my suggestion earlier?"

Once everyone heard that, they knew immediately there's more to this.

Indeed King Zhuangxiang chortled, "I am extremely happy to have this conversation with Shaolong. If we can capture Zhao Mu alive to appease the anger in my heart, he'll definitely be handsomely rewarded. From now on, Shaolong will be my guest as well as the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor, to teach Zheng'er martial arts and the art of war."

Lu Buwei was ecstatic and hurriedly raised his cup to congratulate Xiang Shaolong.

The Crown Prince is the successor to the throne and if one can become his Teacher, when the Crown Prince ascends the throne in future, he will be able to exert the most direct influence. Therefore this is not a minor official post and everyone is eyeing this position.

Lord Yangquan walked out from behind his table and knelt on the floor, beseeching, "Your Majesty, please reconsider. Our Great Qin has been established for hundreds of years and are famed for our fighting ability. All those Grand Tutors who are fit to teach the Crown Princes are the best swordsmen in the country and never has an outsider taken this position. Besides, Commander Xiang firstly has not made any military contribution and secondly we do not know if his swordplay is really as good as rumored. Why don't your Majesty decide again after Commander Xiang captures Zhao Mu back!"

His words can be considered reasonable, so obviously this person still has some brains but King Zhuangxiang is not listening at all and said unhappily, "How can I possibly judge a person wrongly. We'll just do it this way, there is no need for Left Premier to speak any further,"

Wang He can't help but step out as well and knelt down, "Your Majesty must reconsider, otherwise I'm afraid others will not agree in their hearts."

Once this great general speaks, it's akin to the military in Qin voicing out their objections and although King Zhuangxiang was furious, he can't help but hesitate.

On seeing this, Xiang Shaolong knelt and said, "What Left Premier and Great General said is not unreasonable. Your Majesty, please retract your orders. Let's see if I can capture Zhao Mu first before you decide."

Wu Yingyuan and Zhu Ji secretly thought it's a great pity, and Zhu Ji was secretly lamenting that her chances of getting in touch with Xiang Shaolong has now been reduced.

Whereas Xiao Pan almost felt like giving Lord Yangquan a good beating.

King Zhuangxiang sighed and said, "Officials, please rise."

Lord Yangquan and Wang He knows that he has changed his mind and went back to their tables happily.

Xiang Shaolong walked back to his table calmly.

Wang He saw that he did not seem at all bothered and can't help but feel curious.

Before King Zhuangxiang could speak, Lu Buwei laughed loudly and drew everyone's attention to him.

Lu Buwei said seriously, "How can the position of Crown Prince's Grand Tutor be left empty for more than half a year. Regarding military knowledge, Shaolong has shown his remarkable observations and in both Zhao and Wei, Shaolong managed to overcome enemy troops with a smaller number of men. He also executed Xiao Weimou and his famed has spread throughout the land. As long as Lord Yangquan and Great General invite who they think is the greatest swordsman in our country to have a duel at a later date in front of his Majesty, we'll be able to see immediately who is better."

King Zhuangxiang was overjoyed, "We'll do it this way! All right, let us drink and be merry."

He clapped his hands and a group of dancers floated into the hall immediately to sing and dance but they could not dispel the tense atmosphere hanging in the air.

Both sides were getting ready to make the other side fall badly.

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly to himself, knowing that he is now embroiled in the Qin court's power struggle.

Maybe this is what they refer to as, 'having no choice when one is out in the martial arts realm'.

CHAPTER 3

News From Afar

[Translated by JEAN]

THE FOLLOWING ten days, Xiang Shaolong spent the most relaxing time ever since he arrived in this ancient era.

Together with his wives and maids, Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Wu Zhuo and the thousand family warriors who followed him from Handan, they went to the Wu family's newly established farm at the outskirts to rest and relax.

The farm is very big and on a fast horse it takes at least two hours to ride from one end to the other and it has 18 simple

but well equipped houses. They chose a courtyard next to a pretty valley and named it 'Hidden Dragon Courtyard'.

Every morning when they wake up, he will ride with his wives and maids on the open plains and at the same time practice his archery. He also got the three highly skilled fighters Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and Jing Jun to duel with him and practice the use of various weapons as a warm up practice for the duel with that still unknown person whom Lord Yangquan and the rest are going to choose.

The 'Elite Soldiers' have expanded to 300 men from the original 77 men and they practice day and night to prepare themselves so that they can be chosen to return to Handan in future to capture Zhao Mu alive.

With a real special task force warrior like Xiang Shaolong heading the unit, this batch of people improved by leaps and bounds and learnt the various spying and tactics used once they have infiltrated the enemy camp.

There are a lot of people in the Wu family and some of them are craftsmen who know how to work with metal. Following Xiang Shaolong's instructions, Wu Zhuo set up a workshop for the blacksmiths and they made secret weapons like climbing hooks and flying needles according to his designs.

Xiang Shaolong also did not forget to meditate according to the instructions on the scroll taken from the Mohist token. Teng Yi was very interested after he found out about this and learnt the technique from him and he practices it with greater effect than Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong might as well just give him the scroll so that he can study the military and sword fighting techniques on the scroll on his own. Their relationship is now even closer than real brothers.

Just as they were enjoying the bliss, Tao Fang came.

Everyone gathered in the hall for a meeting.

Tao Fang exclaimed excitedly, "There's news from Handan and it's really exciting." But he did not immediately continue with his story.

When everyone saw him trying to keep them in suspense, they were so anxious. The only exception was Teng Yi who remained unmoving and calm as usual.

Tao Fang said with a laugh, "Let me tell you one issue at a time! This time the person who was most affected by us is Zhao Mu. Only when the Zhaos found our secret tunnel that led to outside the city did they realize they have been tricked. Later then received news that the real Ying Zheng has reached Xianyang and King Xiaocheng was so upset he fell sick and also gave Zhao Mu a terrible scolding, refusing to see him for one whole month. Their relationship only improved a little recently but Zhao Mu's influence is not as before. Instead that Guo Kai must have said something and managed to trick that muddle headed King Xiaocheng into trusting him."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but ask, "How is Zhao Ya's situation?"

Tao Fang knows that he has not forgotten this capricious beauty and said with a sigh, "She fell very ill as well. That Qi Yu still wanted to look for her but she chased him out of her residence and many people saw that!"

Wu Zhuo asked in bewilderment, "The King of Zhao did not blame her at all?"

Tao Fang said with a sigh, "It seems that she had once tried very hard to persuade the King of Zhao not to deal with Shaolong so now the muddle headed ruler is now feeling a little regret over that and she is so seriously ill as well. It could be due to these reasons that Zhao Ya's standing is not very much affected. Now everyone in Handan is fearful, worried that we will lead the Qin army to attack Zhao. Recently King Xiaocheng has sent envoys to the various states hoping to join forces with them to deal with the Qin's invasion. What a joyous outcome."

Teng Yi asked, "What's the fate of the fake Ying Zheng?"

Tao Fang shook his head and sighed, "Executed by Zhao Mu. He was so furious and he can only take it out on this innocent and pitiful person."

Although Xiang Shaolong felt a little sad about this, but it's something that cannot be helped.

Tao Fang suddenly reached out and put his hand on Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and said quietly, "Let me tell you something but you must not get angry."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and asked, "What's the matter?"

A strange look passed over Tao Fang's eyes as he said solemnly, "There's news of Mei Canniang."

Xiang Shaolong's expression changed as he asked, "She's dead?"

Tao Fang shook his head, "No! She married to another village nearby and even has a son now. Her husband is quite a famous hunter and it seems that he's quite in love with her."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned for a moment, and felt more relaxed instead. He thought of their parting and maybe at that time Mei Canniang has already made up her mind not to leave that peaceful place. That's good too! Most importantly she has found someone good.

Jing Jun went to stand next to Tao Fang and whispered, "Did you send my letter to Zhao Zhi?"

Teng Yi was shocked and exclaimed, "Did you reveal in your letter that we will be returning to Handan?"

Teng Yi was startled and replied, "Of course not, how can I not know the severity of this matter."

Tao Fang took out a letter and pressed it into Jing Jun's hands and said with a laugh, "It seems that Zhao Zhi is a little interested in you!"

Jing Jun exclaimed with joy, turned three somersaults and dashed off in a rush, causing everyone else to laugh at him.

Tao Fang saw that even after hearing the news about Mei Canniang, Xiang Shaolong still remained calm so he was assured and continued, "The man we sent to Daliang has returned with news, it seems that Learned Lady Ji has gone to the state of Chu."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Oh no! She must be going to Handan to look for me."

At the same time everyone understood his meaning. Naturally Learned Lady Ji cannot go directly to Zhao to look for him so she can only go to Chu first and then travel to Handan via Qi.

In ancient times communications is not very convenient and most likely Ji Yanran is still unaware of what has happened in Handan.

However Xiang Shaolong could not think straight due to his concern and said with determination, "We'll go to Handan immediately!"

Tao Fang replied, "We have to at least wait until the day after. The Qins have already selected a person to fight with you for the position of the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor and the duel is set for the day after in front of his Majesty. Anyone who has some status will be there to watch the duel."

Wu Zhuo asked, "Who is that person?"

Tao Fang replied, "I think he's called Wang Jian!"

Xiang Shaolong was greatly stunned and thought how can there be such a coincidence.

Xiang Shaolong sat alone to think next to a tiny waterfall near the farm.

In this Warring States era, there is indeed paradise everywhere, just like the rare scenery right before his eyes. The mountain peaks standing in line, strange and unique rocks, clear water flowing in between, waterfalls and ponds and the moving water reflecting the rays of the sun. One can never grow tired of seeing this scenery.

He sat next to a pond, listening to the musical sounds of the waterfall falling into the clear pond, looking at the lush green bamboo trees next to the bank waving in the wind. The scene is filled with the sense of spring, life and growth and he can't help but feel energized.

But once his attention turned to the duel the day after, he's filled with gloom again.

No matter which one of them wins, he's afraid there'll be a problem.

The problem is whether he can change history.

If the answer is no, he can then not bother himself with anything and retire to the woods happily, enjoying life with his wives and maids everyday and Xiao Pan will naturally become the first Emperor of China.

The frustration is that he cannot be sure.

If he wins Wang Jian, will the other party still become a key official in unifying the six states in future?

This is really a test to his brains.

But he cannot lose as well, otherwise the Wu family warriors will be badly affected and it'll also be a great blow to Xiao Pan and even his trip to Handan may be affected as well.

Just as he was feeling troubled, the sweet laughter of young girls can be heard.

Hidden amongst the trees, the two pretty maids Cuitong and Cuilu, each carrying two small wooden pails, came to fetch water. They were talking and laughing softly and did not notice the presence of Xiang Shaolong.

The two girls came to the side of the pond and put down their small pails.

Cuitong sat down on a rock while Cuilu took off her shoes, revealing her pretty naked feet and stepped into the water. She was relaxed and occasionally let out a tinkling laugh.

Xiang Shaolong remembered how he flirted and had fun with Mei Canniang at the lake in the valley and a wave of emotions came over him.

Cuitong suddenly asked, "Has Young Master hugged you before?"

Cuilu giggled and asked her back, "What about you?"

Cuitong blushed and nodded her head. She looked bothered as she said, "Hai! He just lightly put his hand around my waist and kissed my face, that's all."

Cuilu laughed, "Our little lass is in love."

Cuitong said angrily, "You're not much better than me, you were calling out for Young Master last night in your dreams."

Cuilu cried out with embarrassment, "Don't say anymore!"

Looking at the two girls, the troubled Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel his heart lurch and stood up from where he was hidden.

The two girls suddenly saw that there's a person and turned their heads around. When they saw it was Xiang Shaolong, they were initially shocked, which quickly turned to embarrassment as they blushed, not knowing where to hide themselves.

Xiang Shaolong was afraid they'll run away out of embarrassment and quickly moved to their sides and grabbed their soft hands.

The two girls' bodies went soft immediately as they collapsed onto the ground next to the pond and refused to get up, their heads bowed so low that it seems they're trying to hide them in their bosoms.

Xiang Shaolong's lust was ignited on seeing this and asked with a laugh, "You refuse to move? Then we can just have fun here in this pond."

The two girls were greatly shocked and cried out in unison, "No! We'll be seen."

Xiang Shaolong threatened them, "You don't want to be seen? Then come with me obediently!"

The two girls stood up helplessly, filled with embarrassment and joy.

Xiang Shaolong pulled the two girls along, stepping on the uneven rocks as they walked along the river upstream and after a short while came to a small pond at the highest level. It offered them a bird's eye view of the pretty scenery down the valley.

He told the two girls to sit down next to him and with his arms around their shoulders, they admired this fairy-tale like scenery.

The two girls can't help but lean towards his embrace, their fragrance intoxicating him.

Is civilization a good thing or a bad thing?

Man is caught in his own trap by the technology 2000 years later by constantly spoiling this beautiful nature. If anyone could have come to his era like he has, they will certainly be filled with regret that nature has changed so much.

Cuitong asked quietly, "Has Young Master been sitting there all this while earlier?"

Xiang Shaolong replied mischievously, "I was sleeping and didn't hear anything about a light hug, kissing faces or someone talking in their dreams last night."

The two girls were immediately shamefaced and groaned as they buried their pretty faces in his arms.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly commending that men in this era is really fortunate as his hands caressed their soft cheeks, massaging them gently.

The two girls were trembling under his touch as their breathing quickened.

At this point in time, there is no need for words.

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head and as if looking for a treasure, searched for Cuitong's fragrant lips and he kissed her hard.

Whereas his other hand started his invasion towards Cuilu.

Cuilu has no defense against his expert caresses and teasing so she moaned in protest, "Young Master!"

By now the sun is slowly setting and a white cloud happened to float across and became a bright red fireball hanging in the sky under the reflection of the setting bright sun.

Xiang Shaolong left Cuitong's fragrant lips and this pretty young girl who was aroused gave a soft moan and turned around to hug his strong waist.

He lowered his head towards the blushing Cuilu whom he was caressing. This pretty girl was sneaking peeks at him and

on seeing his direct gaze she became totally embarrassed. That captivating look made Xiang Shaolong unable to control himself and he asked with a laugh, "With the grass as our bed and the sky as our blanket, will the two elder sisters object?"

The two girls were moaning so much that they couldn't speak.

That night Xiang Shaolong thoroughly enjoyed himself but even when he was being captivated, images of Ji Yanran, Mei Canniang and even Zhao Ya flashed through his mind.

The women all knew that he will soon be leaving for Zhao and in their sadness, they tried even harder to make him happy, unable to bear the parting with him.

Time seems to past especially fast under such situations and they left this pretty little valley two days later to return to Xianyang City. With the exception of Jing Jun, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo both stayed behind to continue the training of the elite troops.

They have just reached the Wu residence and Wu Yingyuan has already dragged him aside, saying seriously, "Tu Xian has done a check on that Wang Jian. It seems that not only is this person's swordsmanship is the best in Qin, he is most formidable in horse riding and archery. He can fire three arrows consecutively and he uses an iron bow with copper string. No man or beast within 500 steps can escape."

He thought of that irritating Lian Jin, whose archery skills may not even be better than this person's, Xiang Shaolong

can't help but feel his head grow numb as he asked, "How old is this person?"

Obviously Wu Yingyuan is worried for him and said with a sigh, "He should be around 20 this year and it seems that he has quite gentle and scholarly features. No one would be able to guess from his looks that he is so formidable."

He continued somberly, "Tu Xian found out that Lord Yangquan and Wang He have already decided long ago that he will duel with you but they dragged it for so many days so that he can make use of this time to practice harder. These people are up to no good and knows that you have been separated from your wives for so long, you'll certainly expend a lot of energy between the sheets. To think that they can even think of that. Even Premier Lu is very worried now!"

Xiang Shaolong remembered his amorous night and felt guilty and at the same time thought that he is indeed belittling his enemy.

Wu Yingyuan tapped his shoulder and said, "Try to conserve your energy as much as possible. I will explain to Fang'er."

Xiang Shaolong returned to Hidden Dragon Abode and hid himself in the Solitude Room to meditate according to the Mohist instructions and in no time he was deep in meditation, forgetting about everything else.

"Kok! Kok!"

The sound of the door being knocked woke Xiang Shaolong up abruptly.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly opened the door only to see Wu Tingfang's looking distressed and stammering, "Xiao Jun has been beaten up and he's quite seriously injured!"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked and hurriedly made his way to the main building. Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang were all there as well as the two Wu family's resident physicians who were helping to stop the bleeding and bandaging Jing Jun.

Xiang Shaolong squeezed his way to Jing Jun and after instructing everyone else to stand back, he began to inspect his injury.

He has at least seven to eight stab wounds and the most serious was the one on his left chest, which almost pierced his heart. The other injuries may look scary but they're all superficial wounds. However, two of the stab wounds were so deep that his bones can be seen and his flesh and skin is opened wide, looking extremely frightening.

Jing Jun lost too much blood and is now in a semi-conscious state, his face contorting in severe pain occasionally.

Although Xiang Shaolong was upset, he knows that he should be able to survive this. He retreated to stand between Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang and asked, "Who did this!"

Wu Yingyuan replied, "We've already informed Tu Xian, they will send someone to investigate. Luckily this lad has a

strong constitution. He's so seriously injured yet he only collapsed after he dragged himself back. He's really formidable."

Tao Fang said, "These people are obviously after his life."

The guard was heard calling out, "Premier Lu arrives!"

Everyone did not expect Lu Buwei to visit personally and they turned around in surprise to welcome him.

Lu Buwei walked in under the escort of a dozen odd bodyguards and after taking a close look at Jing Jun's injuries, he walked to one corner to speak with the three of them. He said seriously, "This must be the ploy of Lord Yangquan and his men. They want to kill Xiao Jun so as to affect Shaolong's mind. Shaolong you must not be tricked."

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, "Obviously they've underestimated Xiao Jun's ability to escape. As soon as Xiao Jun wakes up, we will know who did this."

Lu Buwei replied, "No matter who did this, we will settle everything with our enemy after the duel with Wang Jian tomorrow. As long as Shaolong gets the title of Grand Tutor, I will give Shaolong all my support to help Xiao Jun claim this blood debt and let everyone know that Lu Buwei is not someone to be bullied."

Xiang Shaolong is in a dilemma. He does not want to be on such close terms with Lu Buwei but it seems that if the situation were to continue developing like this, he will become Lu Buwei's party sooner or later.

This is not the problem. He's most afraid that once everyone develop feelings for one another, it'll be a headache in future.

Jing Jun groaned and regained consciousness.

Everyone rushed forward.

Jing Jun only saw Xiang Shaolong and he exclaimed angrily, "Big Brother! They were so vicious!"

Xiang Shaolong reached out to press his shoulder down, "Don't move!"

Lu Buwei asked quietly, "Who did this!"

Jing Jun calmed down a little and gritted his teeth in pain, saying, "There were 20 odd people, I only recognize one of them as 'Scarface' Guoxing."

After Lu Buwei gave instructions for him to be carried to the room to tend to his injuries, his eyes gleamed murderously as he said, "This Guoxing is quite famous in Xianyang and is one of the three main tutors in Weinan Martial Arts School. The principal Qiu Risheng is quite close with the military and has never given any respect to my men. Shaolong, help me kick that school down at a later date. I want the Qins to know that they won't have a good life if they offend me. How many people will you need? Just say it out."

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed and thought that he wants them to be his fighter and replied, "This is just a small matter, we have enough resources to deal with this."

Lu Buwei exclaimed happily, "With Shaolong around, our entire situation is changed. If Lord Yangquan and his men were not afraid of Shaolong, they would not have resorted to such tricks."

He paused and continued, "I will come and meet up with you first tomorrow before we enter the Palace together. I am confident that Shaolong will not disappoint."

Xiang Shaolong had a thought and he made some eye signals with Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang first before saying, "Let Shaolong send Premier Lu out!"

Wu and Tao understood his meaning and let him send Lu Buwei to his waiting carriage outside alone.

Lu Buwei is an extremely astute man and he asked quietly, "Is there something Shaolong wants to say?"

Xiang Shaolong just smiled without talking, until they came to the carriage before he said, "Not a moment during the last ten days have Shaolong not been thinking hard for Premier Lu and I think that it's not a very good idea to continuously oppose the local Qin power. Maybe in the end both sides will be seriously wounded."

Lu Buwei sighed, "Congeniality should be the key to everything. I've thought of this as well but the Qins have always been suspicious of outsiders and no one will believe that I'm sincerely giving my best for the state of Qin."

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, "Since they joined forces because of mutual benefits, then we will split them up by

luring them. For the hardcore people like Lord Yangquan or Weinan Martial Arts School, we will destroy them heartlessly and make use of the opportunity to stand our ground. But for people like Wang He who are not doing this for personal gains entirely, we can try to bribe him into joining our side.”

A strange light came over Lu Buwei’s eyes and after eyeing Xiang Shaolong intently, he nodded his head and said, “Shaolong seems to have a plan, say it out quickly!”

Xiang Shaolong gave a short summary of his plan.

After hearing it, Lu Buwei said, “Naturally it’ll be good if this can be done but I’m just afraid that if we’re not careful, things can become worse and lives will be sacrificed in vain.”

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, “The Wu family is hugely indebted to Premier Lu, so what’s the big deal even if I have to take some risk?”

Lu Buwei chortled and grasped Xiang Shaolong’s shoulders tightly before leaving.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has gained Lu Buwei’s trust and he turned back to look for Jing Jun.

CHAPTER 4

The Imperial Duel

[Translated by JEAN]

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE gathered at the huge square next to the hall in Xianyang Palace. It was like a marketplace, with everyone waiting impatiently to see the grand duel that's about to be held.

On one side there were the Qin's most famously invincible and fierce warrior.

On the other side is a rising star with great military merits, a swordsman from Zhao.

Everyone wants to witness how these two are going to fight to win.

The sun was shining brightly and three tall platforms were erected near the main hall with seats neatly arranged on them. The middle platform is naturally the seats for King Zhuangxiang, the Crown Prince and the Empress.

The platform on the left was filled with major officials and military generals who were on Lord Yangquan and Wang He's side.

On the platform on the right, besides Lu Buwei, Meng Ao and the major officials closer to Lu Buwei are already seated. Li Si is one of them. Actually he is not qualified to have a place there at all but because of his concern for Xiang Shaolong, he managed to talk and persuade his way into getting a seat.

Others who were of a lower status can only stand at the circumference of the square to view the duel.

With the mail armors and helmet gleaming, the Qin soldiers who were taller and bigger built than people from the other six states, stood guard on the long stairway leading to the main hall and around the three viewing platforms. Their long halberds shone under the sun, giving the soldiers a dignified and serious air.

At this time Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong has just arrived in their carriage and they walked towards the right after they alighted. Immediately there was a commotion as people pointed and shouted at Xiang Shaolong.

Lu Buwei exhaled and whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ears, "The Qins love a good fight and hold heroes in high regard. You can only win and not lose in this duel."

Xiang Shaolong has already meditated according to the instructions on the Mohist scroll this morning and at this moment he's feeling very energetic so he said with confidence, "Premier Lu, do not worry!"

Lu Buwei commented, "That person dressed in black warrior outfit on the left platform is Qiu Risheng, don't forget his face." His tone revealed a deep hatred.

Xiang Shaolong looked over that direction only to see the eyes of almost a hundred people on the platform were all focused on him and hurriedly smiled and nodded in response. He took a glance at that Qiu Risheng and then looked away.

Lu Buwei led him up the platform and sat down after introducing him to the other people. He asked Tu Xian who was at the back, "Is Wang Jian here yet?"

Tu Xian replied, "Should be here! But I wonder where he is?"

The sound of the horn was heard.

Under the escort of the imperial guards, King Zhuangxiang who was dressed in his dragon robes, leading Xiao Pan, Zhu Ji, Lady Xiuli and Prince Qi Chongqiao as well as a bevy of concubines, walked out from inside the hall towards the platform in the middle.

All the soldiers stood at attention while the rest of the people both on and off the platform knelt down to welcome them. For a moment the atmosphere in the whole square was solemn and silent.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly complimenting, on seeing this situation he can see the nobility of the King of Qin and how much importance the Qins place on compliance and discipline.

It's only after King Zhuangxiang and the Princes and Concubines were seated and the attendant declared everyone to rise and be seated did the atmosphere returned to what it was previously. However, everyone stopped talking and quietly waited for King Zhuangxiang's announcement.

The attendant cried out, "Where is Xiang Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly rose and at the same time removed his outer robe to reveal his perfect physique. He left the platform to come to the front of the main platform and bowed his acquiesce to the King.

King Zhuangxiang looked at Xiang Shaolong happily and kept on nodded his head to show his approval.

He has lived abroad for many years and basically he can be considered an outsider, therefore he feels a special affinity to this young swordsman from Zhao who rescued his wife as well.

The attendant cried out again, "Where is Wang Jian?"

He has just finished his sentence when the sounds of hooves were heard only to see a steed running in from the palace gates like a gust of wind.

The crowd cheered thunderously as they all gave way to let the steed past unobstructed.

When it comes to flaunting, Xiang Shaolong has obviously lost greatly.

Wang Jian's horsemanship is astounding. In such a short distance, he has already executed several difficult poses and just as he is about to stop, he miraculously curled under the horse's belly and mounted onto the horse's back on the other side before leaping off the horse to kneel at the ground as he cried out loudly, "Your soldier Wang Jian! Paying his respects to your Majesty!"

Once again everyone cheered deafeningly, pushing the whole atmosphere into a high.

Lu Buwei and the rest of the people on the platform, including Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang who were full of confidence for Xiang Shaolong, started feeling a little shaken after seeing his astounding horsemanship. The confidence of Lu Buwei and the others who have not truly seen the ability of Xiang Shaolong were even more affected.

King Zhuangxiang revealed a look of surprise and kept nodding his head.

Because Zhu Ji has a special liking for Xiang Shaolong, she grabbed Xiao Pan's hand anxiously only to realize Xiao Pan's palm is sweating as well.

Everyone on Lord Yangquan's platform looked ecstatic instead as if Xiang Shaolong's defeat is a sure thing. Wang Jian stood up and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

At the same time Xiang Shaolong looked across with a smile and they saw each other directly.

Both of them revealed a look of surprise at the same time, both shocked at the other's physique and charm.

This Wang Jian is indeed as Wu Yingyuan described, fair and delicate looking but it's not enough to really describe him.

He's only about half an inch shorter than Xiang Shaolong and he wore a red and black warrior's outfit with an armor vest. His arms and shoulders were wide and his build robust, giving out a heroic air.

His nose is high with deep set eyes which looked unfathomable, his jet black hair combed into a small bun at the top and secured tightly with a red rope with its two ends dropping down to the back of his neck which made him appear even more powerful.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly admiring him and smiled in return, thinking that with such a capabilities, no wonder he could help Xiao Pan conquer the world and unite the six states in future.

Wang Jian saw that Xiang Shaolong looked friendly and his countenance relaxed as well and politely returned the greeting but his eyes was still filled with enmity.

At this point in time the attendant from the main platform read out the purpose of the duel this time and naturally at the same time offered encouragement to the contestants and emphasized the importance of maintaining good sportsmanship.

Towards the end, the attendant announced loudly, "The duel today will be split into two parts, with horse riding and archery first followed by swordplay."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting and thought that although he has improved greatly on his riding skills recently, but if he were to compare with Wang Jian, he won't be able to catch up even if he goes back and train for a few more years.

Wang Jian accepted the orders loudly so Xiang Shaolong can only follow him and agree as well.

With a 'whoosh!', Wang Jian leapt up the horse in a graceful motion and rode off. When it looks as if he's almost knocking into the spectators standing at the corner of the square, he pulled his horse back with a stand and the horse turned around gracefully and came to a sudden stop.

Naturally another round of applause and cheers sounded.

2 soldiers took out a target board from the side of the square and placed it right in the middle of the broad square.

At this time Lu Buwei ordered his man to lead Jifeng out. Xiang Shaolong smiled calmly and jumped up the horse's back from its rump and clasped his legs around the horse's belly. Jifeng galloped around the square with astonishing speed and came to another corner of the square and they also received many cheers.

Wang Jian took out his steel bow from the side of his saddle and held it high above his head, which immediately caused another uproar of admiration.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is very confident and was prepared to display his archery skill. He recollected his feelings and shouted to Wang Jian from afar, "How can a still target be compared to a live target, why don't Brother Wang shoot three arrows at me? I guarantee that I won't use my shield to block."

Silence immediately spread through the square but everyone has an incredulous look in their eyes, as if thinking whether this person is seeking death?

But Xiang Shaolong is the only one who can understand the difficult position he is in. Instead of waiting to be defeated, he might as well take the risk and make use of his own swordsmanship and agility to deal with the other party's arrows. If he succeed, then he'll be able to pass this stage.

Wang Jian is not one who likes to take advantage of others and he shouted back, "Arrows have no feelings, has Brother Xiang thought clearly about this."

Xiang Shaolong bowed to King Zhuangxiang from afar and cried out, "Would your Majesty please approve!"

King Zhuangxiang hesitated for a moment before signaling with his hand his approval.

The almost 2000 odd people at the square held their breath, waiting for that heart stopping scene to appear.

Wang Jian lifted his bow with one hand while he pulled out four long arrows from his back with his other hand, holding them between his five fingers, his stance showing his familiarity and making others feel that it's as easy as breathing for him to shoot these four arrows.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting in his heart. It turns out that this person is so unfathomable, making others think that he can only shoot three arrows at once but only now did he reveal his true ability.

Silence.

Wang Jian laughed loudly, "My steel bow and arrows can pierce through any shield, so it doesn't matter even if Brother Xiang uses a shield. Be careful!" He clasped his horse's belly lightly and his warhorse sped forward.

Xiang Shaolong looked heavenward and laughed as he clapped his horse and dashed forward but towards the direction of King Zhuangxiang's side, trying to intimidate him as he will not dare to release the arrows towards King Zhuangxiang's direction and to put him down a little.

The two steeds got closer then further away, their positions exchanged.

Wang Jian pulled his horse's head back and immediately turned back.

Xiang Shaolong's mind went into the Mohist's technique of calmness. Heaven and earth seems to have gone totally quiet in this instant and there's nothing else besides Wang Jian.

At the same time he hurried his horse towards Wang Jian.

As long as he can stick close to Wang Jian and avoid the four arrows, he can consider this horse riding and archery contest a closed deal.

The two steeds got closer and closer, from over 1000 steps away to about less than 700 hundred steps away.

'Twang!'

Wang Jian pulled his bowstring and without knowing how, one of the arrows have landed outside the bowstring.

Instantly the arrow flew out.

Xiang Shaolong has never seen such swift arrow, as if they have just left the bowstring and in the next instant they're at his face.

Luckily his reflexes are ten times more agile than the average person and with a shout, he drew Bloodwave from his back and hacked diagonally at the arrowheads.

The crowd, regardless of friend or foe, all cheered.

Xiang Shaolong reined in his horse, pulled out his sword and blocked, the few movements all done in one fluid motion like flowing water, the angle and timing executed appropriately and exhibiting an extremely splendid pose of movement and strength. Everyone who saw this were moved and cheered for him.

From this one can see that the Qins are straightforward and sincere people.

With a crisp ‘dang!’, the steel arrow landed on the ground.

Wang Jian cried out loudly, ‘Good’ and in an instant he was missing and it turned out that he has flipped under the horse’s belly.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly stunned. His opponent’s arrows earlier were filled with power and the impact cause his whole right arm to become numb and he almost dropped his precious sword Bloodwave. And now he can’t even see Wang Jian at all, which means that he did not even know how he fired the arrow, so how can he not be shocked.

The square is now so quiet one can hear a pin drop, and it seems as if everyone stopped breathing as well.

What are left are only the thundering hoof beats of the warhorses.

Both parties drew nearer, from 700 steps away to 500 steps away.

Without hearing the bow twang at all, Xiang Shaolong saw from his angle two arrows shooting out at the same time

from beneath the horse's belly from the right at an angle, one aimed at his heart while the other speeding towards his thigh, calculated with absolute certainty the precise point when Xiang Shaolong falls, his expertise making others pause in awe.

Xiang Shaolong knows that they are now 200 steps closer to each other and his arm has still not recovered from the numbness yet so there's no way he can use his arm strength to counter his opponent's powerful arrows so he made a risky decision and forcefully used the hilt of the sword to hit down on the incoming arrow and at the same time with his innate reflexes, his leg kicked out like lightning towards the other arrow.

Before the crowd can worry for him, he has already knocked the arrow off target with his sword hilt forcefully while he felt a sharp pain near the tip of his shoes as he kicked the other arrow. Because of the impact, the arrow flew off tangent and flew diagonally up past the front of Xiang Shaolong's body to the highest point in the air before falling down.

By now the two steeds are only 300 steps away from each other.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt that something was amiss. It turned out that the last arrow has flown out quietly from the side of the horse's neck at a very difficult angle and unless he can flip down to the horse's belly, there's no way he can avoid the arrow. But by now it's too late.

Xiang Shaolong's arm is aching so much by now that he can't even lift or put it down and it's pure luck that he can still hold on to Bloodwave. He roared and his left hand drew out the wooden sword on the side of the horse and attempted to sweep his opponent's last arrow away.

"Puff!"

The steel arrow was swept aside.

The crowd cheered thunderously. Even Wang Jian can't help but cried out, 'Excellent' as he hung his bow back on his horse's back and pulled out his sword to charge towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong dare not let down his guard. He put Bloodwave back across his back and waving the wooden sword with his left hand, urged his horse forward.

The two of them brushed past each other and the continuous ringing of wood against metal rang throughout the square.

Xiang Shaolong could feel that his opponent's arm strength is the same, if not better, than his own and was secretly startled. He deliberately rode to the edge of the square before turning his horse back so that he can gain more time for his right arm to recover.

All the spectators felt as if their hearts are now in their throats.

Wang Jian raised his long sword high up and sped forward in his horse.

Xiang Shaolong transferred the wooden sword to his right hand, took a deep breath and rode towards this strong opponent.

The two steeds came closer and closer at lightning speed and when they're 50 steps away, Xiang Shaolong suddenly increased his speed as he sat on the handsome steed which his bosom confidante Ji Yanran gave him like an arrow on full speed, looking as if he was riding on a cloud and speeding towards Wang Jian's horse.

Xiang Shaolong executed one of the three killer moves of using defense to attack in the Mohist swordplay, 'Whirlwind Style'. The wooden sword sprang up halfway into the air and turned one round, extremely forceful as it swept across.

Because of his opponent's horse sudden surge, Wang Jiang's estimation was thrown awry. His plan to use his horsemanship to win came to naught, followed by he was confused by his opponent's strange moves. Only when the danger is almost in his face did he manage to block it with his sword.

Xiang Shaolong came up with such a strange plan precisely because he was wary of his horsemanship. If he can figure out Jifeng's speed and his own sword style, he'll definitely lose if it's going to be a long drawn battle. To Wang Jian, he is even more agile on the horse than off.

There was a loud 'Clang!', and Wang Jian almost fell off his horse together with his sword from the upper hand slash because Xiang Shaolong's attack made use of the force of

nature's gravity to increase the strength of his attack. The wooden sword is very heavy in itself, that's why he was able to achieve such an accidental upper hand.

Wang Jian leaned low on his horse's back to defend against Xiang Shaolong's attack.

Xiang Shaolong's wooden sword was a whirl of movement on his top right and at the same time when the two horses bursted against each other, he took the opportunity to use his feet to point at two spots on Wang Jian's thigh. However the spectators were all focused on his wooden sword and the horses' bodies blocked most of the view from the spectators, therefore only the two of them knew in their hearts what happened and not a third person was aware.

Naturally Wang Jian knew that he was being lenient.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the time is now ripe and he waved their prearranged signal with his wooden sword towards Lu Buwei who was on the platform.

By now the two steed have exchanged places and looking at each other from afar.

Wang Jian looked totally dejected. He is a valiant hero, so a loss is a loss and he will not attempt to deny it. Just as he was about to abandon his sword and admit defeat, Lu Buwei stood up forcefully and cried out, "Stop!"

Everyone looked at him in astonishment.

Lu Buwei walked to the side of the stage and knelt towards King Zhuangxiang and said, "Regardless of swordsmanship or

horse riding and archery, both Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian are on par with each other. Your subordinate would not wish to see any of them injured. I beseech your Majesty to declare that there's no winner or loser in this duel and both of them will have the honor of bring the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor and bear the heavy responsibility of guiding the Crown Prince."

Half of those people seated on Lord Yangquan's side looked flabbergasted as they did not expect Lu Buwei to be so magnanimous. Although they did not see the two light kicks Xiang Shaolong gave to Wang Jian earlier, everyone saw how Wang Jian almost fell off the horse due to the impact of Xiang Shaolong's sword and knew that he has lost his advantage.

King Zhuangxiang nodded his head slightly and asked Xiang Shaolong, "What does my beloved subject Xiang think of this, are you willing put a halt to this!"

By saying that, naturally it's because he could tell that Xiang Shaolong has a higher chance of winning.

Anyone with some sense, on seeing Wang Jian's expression, will not feel optimistic for him.

Xiang Shaolong returned his sword to his sheath and replied respectfully, "General Wang's horse riding and archery skills are astounding and his swordsmanship extraordinary and I am very impressed. Premier Lu's suggestion is like the fresh water after a long drought and I am most willing to accept it."

King Zhuangxiang chortled and stood up as he announced, "From today onwards, both Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian will both be the Crown Prince's Grand Tutors and will both serve the prince as equals."

Cheers erupted thunderously.

The most grateful person is Wang Jian. The post of the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor is too important to him, otherwise there's no way he can use his abilities even though he is full of aspirations.

But the happiest person is Lu Buwei. This idea that Xiang Shaolong taught him is most beautiful indeed, winning him the cheers of almost everyone present and this sweet feeling is something he has never experienced before in Qin.

Zhu Ji is so excited that she clutched Xiao Pan's hand tightly and whispered in his ear, "Fresh water after a long drought, is there anyone in this world other than your Tutor who can speak so beautifully in this world?"

Xiao Pan's eyes gleamed as he looked at his only family and kept nodding his head.

Amidst the continuous cheers, Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian both rode towards the main platform and dismounted to express their gratitude.

Just as everyone was sending King Zhuangxiang off, Wang Jian said quietly, "Thank you!"

Xiang Shaolong replied in a low voice as well, "This is our secret, Brother Wang can just invite me for a drink!"

Wang Jiang was just getting worried that he will boast about this matter and now he is so grateful that he immediately agreed.

By now all the royalty and officials have clamored down the platforms to hurry and offer their congratulations to the both of them.

Xiang Shaolong took this opportunity to move to Wang He and thanked him sincerely for giving him this opportunity and this made Wang He immediately feel proud, as if he was really the one who helped Xiang Shaolong get a leg up.

Lu Buwei and him are already in agreement over this so naturally he won't blame him for being so nice to Wang He. Instead he turned to offer his congratulations to Wang Jian in order to gain his trust.

On seeing such a splendid ending, Kiang Zhuangxiang beamed as well.

Besides Lord Yangquan and a few of his hardcore followers who looked somber because they've failed to defeat Xiang Shaolong, everyone else was in a cheery and festive mood because they've witnessed such a magnificent duel.

They managed to pass a thunderstorm safely.

CHAPTER 5

Making A Strange Encounter

[Translated by JEAN]

AFTER the duel, King Zhuangxiang summoned Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian into the Palace to offer his encouragement. He also praised Lu Buwei in public, impressed with his wonderful suggestion.

That night Lu Buwei held a private feast at his residence and the only people invited were Xiang Shaolong, Wu Yingyuan and Meng Ao. On his side, besides Lu Buwei himself, there was only his trusted aide Tu Xian and a few respected

houseguests. Li Si is still not qualified enough to be part of such high class and intimate gatherings.

During the feast Lu Buwei was in high spirits and kept encouraging Xiang Shaolong to drink more.

Meng Ao witnessed Xiang Shaolong's extraordinary swordsmanship and how he faced death heroically and was thoroughly impressed and changed his opinion of him.

Wu Yingyuan was even more ecstatic on seeing how his beloved son-in-law has made such a great contribution.

Wine was passed for several rounds as the singers and dancers have ended their entertainment.

Lu Buwei chortled and told Xiang Shaolong who was sitting opposite him, "Recently the Qis have sent me three song courtesans who are all rare beauties and well versed in music, chess and dance. A beauty is a match with a hero, I will in turn offer them as gifts to Shaolong, Mister Wu and General Meng, please do not decline."

Wu Yingyuan and Meng Ao were secretly thinking that the beauties Lu Buwei is giving out must be good and expressed their thanks happily.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that he already cannot handle his beautiful wives and pretty maids at home and he's also not used to the thinking of the people during the warring states period where they regard women as tools or decorations so he hurriedly rejected, "Shaolong is appreciative of Premier's kind intentions but the journey to

Handan is like an arrow already pulled on the bow and must be fired. Shaolong does not wish to be distracted by beauties for now and I hope Premier will forgive me.”

Lu Buwei saw that he is not greedy for beauties at all and a sense of respect welled up in his heart. On top of that he was not conceited about his feat, so Lu Buwei said with a smile, “Then I will ask Mister Wu to keep her for you and Shaolong can enjoy yourself after you’ve captured Zhao Mu.”

There was uproar as everyone made fun of Wu Yingyuan, saying that he might not be able to hold himself back and use the beauty for himself instead and the atmosphere became festive.

Xiang Shaolong saw that there’s no way he could object so he can only accept the gift with a wry smile.

Meng Ao asked, “When does Shaolong plan to leave for Zhao.”

Xiang Shaolong thought of Ji Yanran and wish that he could set off immediately. He took a glance at Lu Buwei’s houseguests and hesitated.

Lu Buwei knew what he was concerned about and said with a smile, “It’s all our own people in here, Shaolong can just speak your mind.”

Xiang Shaolong said in a low voice, “We’ll set off immediately as soon as Xiao Jun recovers.”

Lu Buwei nodded his head and said, "I will bring this matter up to his Majesty and when the time comes we'll just find an excuse, maybe say that we want you to go somewhere on a mission, then Shaolong will be able to secretly go towards the Zhao border without anyone noticing."

Right now he has full confidence in Xiang Shaolong and although he does not know how Xiang Shaolong intends to capture Zhao Mu alive, he truly believes that he will succeed.

Lu Buwei changed the subject and said, "Xiao Jun must be avenged, how does Shaolong plan to deal with that Qiu Risheng and Guo Xing?"

Wu Yingyuan seems a little worried about this as he asked, "If this matter gets out of hand, will his Majesty be displeased?"

Lu Buwei replied with a laugh, "Don't worry! I have brought this matter up to his Majesty earlier and he is also very unhappy with Qiu Risheng's despicable methods so Shaolong can go ahead and do whatever you want. I will bear responsibility if anything happens."

Xiang Shaolong was extremely furious that Jing Jun was almost killed and his gaze turned icy as he said coldly, "Shaolong knows what to do now."

After staying in this era for such a long time, he is long familiar that a lot of matters have to be settled through brute force, otherwise sooner or later he will be the one who will be in danger. If not for the fact that Jing Jun managed to escape this time, otherwise they won't even

know who has killed him. So he can't be too bothered by allowing himself to become Lu Buwei's fighter for once.

If he does not teach the other party a hard lesson, the same thing can happen to Tao Fang or Wu Yingyuan and by then it'll be too late for regrets.

The feast continued amidst such festive atmosphere until both the hosts and guests have drunk their fill before they all went home.

On the way back Wu Yingyuan was feeling tipsy as he said with a sigh, "To have such a fine son-in-law like Shaolong, not only is it Tingfang's good fortune but also the Wu family's good luck. If not for Shaolong, how can we possibly have such lavish lives in Qin."

Xiang Shaolong has developed deep feelings of his astute father-in-law. Almost right from the start, Wu Yingyuan has supported this son-in-law of his without asking for anything in return and even married his beloved daughter to him, so how can he not feel grateful.

Hot tears flowed out of Wu Yingyuan as he continued, "Once Shaolong captures Zhao Mu, you must most importantly ask his Majesty to build a grand cenotaph in Xianyang for Father. Once I think how he has gone with no remains left behind, I... hai!"

Xiang Shaolong was worried that his health will be affected after all the drinks so he hurriedly consoled him.

He felt a mix of emotions, it seems that he should build cenotaphs for Zhao Ni, Shu'er and Su Nu as well so that at least there's something to pay his respects to.

Naturally that night at Hidden Dragon Abode, he was engaged in loving copulation with the ladies.

The next morning, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo had rushed back after hearing news of Jing Jun's injury and they even took with them 15 highly skilled swordsmen from the elite troops.

Jing Jun was in better spirits now and can sit up and talk.

After taking a look at his injuries, Teng Yi nodded his head and said, "They are out for Xiao Hun's life indeed."

Jing Jun said worriedly, "You must include me on your trip to Handan."

Wu Zhuo replied, "Then you'd better have a good sleep!" He made eye contact with the other two before leaving the room.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi followed him out into the hall. Wu Zhuo said, "The only way is to repay violence with violence, otherwise the same thing will happen again sooner or later."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "And we must do it openly, try our best to amplify the matter and let everyone know that us Wu family is not one to be bullied."

Teng Yi said, "No more delays then, I have not exercised my muscles for a long time."

Xiang Shaolong chortled, "Then why don't we set off immediately. After teaching those idiots a lesson, we'll still have enough time to enjoy a sumptuous lunch."

The three of them stood up and leading those 15 excellent fighters, rode out of the Wu residence towards the Martial Arts School.

Along the way, the streets were filled with people, carriages and horses, making it extremely lively.

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong is riding through Xianyang on a horse and everything seemed interesting. Along the way he chatted and pointed at interesting things with the rest of the group, feeling very happy.

Teng Yi suddenly reined his horse to a stop and looked towards the direction of sounds where there was some commotion, only to see chaos on the pavement. There was a 'bang!' as a fruits and vegetables stall set up outside a provisions shop was knocked to the ground and everyone jumped out of the way.

Suddenly a woman with a long scarf covering her head and face scurried out of the crowd and dashed towards another passageway with five to six huge and ferocious looking men running after her.

Right at this time a mule cart rode over and that woman whose features cannot be seen clearly screamed in alarm. Just as she was about to be knocked down by the cart, she fortunately managed to step back in time but she tripped on something, lost her balance and fell.

The scarf covering her head fell and her long silky hair fell, touching the ground.

The few brutish men caught up with her and surrounded the woman.

The woman raised her pretty face and screamed, "Kill me! I will never go back."

Xiang Shaolong and everyone else's eyes brightened, they did not expect this woman to be so young and beautiful.

Teng Yi shouted as he jumped off his horse.

One of the men sniggered, "You dare to interfere in our matters, are you tired of living!"

Teng Yi stepped in between two of the men in one large stride.

The two men roared in anger as they raised their fists to punch.

Teng Yi lowered himself slightly as his iron fists extended out from his left and right. The two burly men immediately were thrown off upon impact with his fists, unable to get up again.

The other four men all pulled out their weapons.

Wu Zhuo gave a secret signal and the 15 warriors all leapt down their horses and stood in formation.

Teng Yi ignored those people and came to the young lady's side, extending his hand as he said, "Miss, get up!"

The young lady looked up at Teng Yi deeply, her pretty face filled with anguish as she shook her head and said, "You cannot win them, leave! Otherwise all of you will be implicated."

Xiang Shaolong who was still on his horse was secretly stunned. His men are all strong and one look others will know they are not easily bullied, then why does this pretty girl have no confidence in them at all? Where could the other party be from?

Teng Yi was touched that she can be so considerate of others even under such circumstances and he said with a smile, "I, Teng Yi, have never feared anyone. At the most I will lose my life!"

The young lady placed her hand in his huge palm and her delicate body trembled as Teng Yi pulled her up.

The burly men helped up the two men who fell on the ground as they eyed them hostilely. One of them suddenly saw Xiang Shaolong who was behind seated on a tall horse and exclaimed hoarsely, "Isn't that Grand Tutor Xiang?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly commented to himself that he has not become such a prominent figure. His eyes swept across the crowd as he nudged his horse forward. The burly men's attitude suddenly became very respectful as he asked, "What is this all about?"

The leader of the men said, "Your lowly one is called Zhang Lang, from Premier Lu's residence. I was under Premier's

orders to send two Qi ladies to your residence but this lady slipped away along the way.”

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo exchanged a look and chortled, “So it’s just a misunderstanding. All right! Just take it that you have handed this Qi lady to me, all of you may return to report your mission accomplished.”

The man said, “There’s one more, in the horse carriage behind...”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling hilarious as he said, “Then I’ll have to trouble you brothers to send her to my house.”

The men saw how polite he was and developed a liking to him as they bowed and left.

Xiang Shaolong moved his horse next to Teng Yi and that Qi lady and on seeing that beauty leaning on Teng Yi helplessly, he had an idea and said, “Shall we find a restaurant nearby to sit down and talk?”

Xiang Shaolong and his men split up into four tables and they ordered food and wine.

Naturally the Qi lady sat with Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo. After drinking a cup of hot tea, color started returning to her previously pale face and she looked even prettier. No wonder Lu Buwei praised their beauty.

Teng Yi remained silent but there was a strange expression in his eyes.

Xiang Shaolong asked gently, "How can I address Miss?"

The Qi lady took a peep at Teng Yi and seeing that he was looking straight ahead, felt a little disappointment as she lowered her head and answered quietly, "My name is Shanlan!"

Wu Zhuo asked, "Why do you still want to run away when you've already reached Xianyang? Martial law is very strict here, with ten families forming a group and if any one family breaks the law, the other families will be punished as well and those who hide the truth and not make any reports will be executed. Who would dare to hide you?"

Shanlan's eyes reddened, "I am prepared to die, so I don't care that much."

Teng Yi's muscular body trembled as he lowered his head and stared at the steam rising up from his cup of hot tea.

Xiang Shaolong asked gently, "Now that Miss Shan knows that you are supposed to come to our residence, do you still want to run away?"

Shanlan was stunned for a moment before lowering her voice in reply, "I don't know!"

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "Why not this! I will give you two choices, either we will send you back to Qi to be reunited with your family, or you will marry my brother Teng Yi." And he tapped Teng Yi's shoulder.

Teng Yi's body shook as he looked at Xiang Shaolong, his expression both embarrassed but there is unhidden gratitude as well.

Love always comes so unexpectedly.

Shanlan's sad situation and her pretty yet piteous face have greatly moved this strong man's already dead heart.

Xiang Shaolong is adept at interpreting others expression so how can he not be aware of Teng Yi's mind.

Shanlan stole another look at Teng Yi and her eyes reddened, and whispered her reply so softly, "I no longer have a home to return to."

Wu Zhuo slapped the table happily, "Then I shall have to congratulate Brother Teng."

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, "Shaolong! She's supposed to be..."

Xiang Shaolong interrupted him, "If you say this then you're not taking me as your Brother. Hai! I'm so happy I almost feel like crying now that Brother Teng has once again accepted a happy life!"

Wu Zhuo said with a laugh, "Guess today is not too suitable to seek trouble with Qiu Risheng!"

Xiang Shaolong replied happily, "We'll go back first and talk!"

He can't help but heave a sigh of relief. He has settled the problem of the Qi lady and Teng Yi with a happy ending, what else can be more ideal than this?

CHAPTER 6
The Spring And Autumn Annals Of Lu
[Translated by JEAN]

THEY have just arrived at the Wu residence when Tao Fang came up to them and said, "I was about to send someone to look for you, and luckily all of you came back."

Xiang Shaolong was startled, "What can be so important?"

Tao Fang replied with a smile, "It is important matter indeed, but it's something good. His Majesty has ordered you to enter the Palace immediately to see him." He then pulled him aside and added with a low voice, "Shaolong, don't blame me for being an old nag, but at the duel yesterday,

the way the Empress looked at you was very strange, you must be careful!”

Xiang Shaolong knew the meaning behind his words and said reassuring, “I know what to do. Even if it will not implicate anyone, I would still not do such a dishonorable and foolish act.”

Tao Fang knows that he is a man of his word and is relieved.

Xiang Shaolong turned his horse around and after rejecting the offer from Wu Zhuo and the rest for escorts, he rode towards the Qin Palace.

The width of the streets of Xianyang is between those of Handan and Daliang, but only in comparison with the few larger streets in the capital of Zhao and Wei. On average, the streets of Xianyang are a lot wider.

He has just turned into the street leading south when Xiang Shaolong had a feeling he was being watched.

It’s a feeling that’s very difficult to put into words.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled.

Maybe it’s because he has meditated so frequently that his senses have become so sharpened. He’s also feeling perplexed why would anyone spy on him.

The place is linked to the market at the south side with shops and residences mixed together. On both sides of the road a huge tree is planted at a space of about every two

feet and the trees grew in lush abundance so it'll be easy for the secret attackers to hide themselves.

He swept the area with his eyes and noticed a few suspicious characters.

Two men were seated at a table next to the window at the 2nd floor of a restaurant and when they saw Xiang Shaolong looking up, they immediately lowered their eyes and pretended to chat.

Another person is a hawker with a stall selling assorted goods at the side of the road, surrounded by a group of people who seem to be buying something. They were haggling about the price but Xiang Shaolong noticed that he was staring at the area where he stood and was so nervous that he could see the vein popping on his forehead.

Amongst the people who had their backs to him, two to three of them were stout looking men and most likely is part of his gang.

On the other side of the street opposite this masquerade hawker, two persons saw Xiang Shaolong riding over and hurriedly snuck behind a tree, obviously up to no good.

However Xiang Shaolong was thinking about something else.

It's not strange that someone will want to hatch a plot to kill him but the strange thing is how did that person manage to know his route and timetable so accurately.

The only explanation is that the other party knows that King Zhuangxiang had summoned him into the Palace, therefore

they are able to set a death trap for him on this only route to the Palace.

And judging by the numbers, his enemy was not afraid that he would have escorts because when they made the plans they would not have expected him to travel alone.

He can't help but feel secretly startled once he thought of this.

By now he can almost be sure that the person who wants to kill him is Lord Yangquan because he is the only one who can be sure of the King of Qin's every move through Lady Xiuli and he is the only one who has the guts and power to deal with him.

He'd actually turned to deal with him after he has dealt with Jing Jun?

The sound of a horse carriage was heard.

Four horse carriages carting hay came towards him, with a rider on each carriage. They were split into two carriages in each group and riding towards him close to the pedestrian path on the left and right sides of the road, leaving a few feet of space in between and enough for him to run straight across.

Just by looking at the time, place and way the horse carriages appeared, Xiang Shaolong knows that something is wrong.

At this point of life and death, he dare not delay and he held Jifeng's reins lightly as he pretended not to notice and rode

towards the horse carriages and at the same time secretly drew out two steel needles from his waist and hid them in his palms.

Both sides got closer to each other.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking it hilarious. He clasped the horse's belly lightly with his thighs and Jifeng who has been his steed for quite some time already understands his needs and immediately increased its speed and in an instant was riding between the four carriages.

This move was totally beyond the expectations of the other party and the four men riding the carriages all cried out in unison and revealed a sinister look.

The hay was thrown into the sky and there was an archer hidden in each of the carriage of hay. They stood up from the hay, cocked their arrows and at the same time aimed it at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong roared and Jifeng dashed forward. At the same time he waved his hands and the needles flew towards the back.

Before the archers in the two front carriages had a chance to shoot, the flying needles were already embedded in their faces and they fell back into the haystack.

The other two blindly shot their arrows in their haste and lost their aim. The arrows flew past his back, crisscrossing each other.

Xiang Shaolong chortled and Jifeng ran full speed ahead and in an instant, disappeared far away into the long street and there's nothing his enemies can do.

Xiang Shaolong met King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji with her 'son' in the inner hall of the Imperial Palace and naturally Lu Buwei was there as well.

The hall was elegantly decorated and King Zhuangxiang sat alone at the head on a raised dais while Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong sat on his left and Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan sat on the right, each of them with a table in front.

The palace maids came in and laid out the food and wine and retreated. The guards were standing guard outside, which makes this lunch has the atmosphere of a family gathering.

Xiao Pan's attitude was serious and did not sneak a peek at Xiang Shaolong at all.

Zhu Ji was also more reserved and although she's even more beautiful now and is not as forward like before.

The huge windows on both sides of the hall was wide open and they can see the curving corridors outside, the lush woods and flowers, serene and quiet without any human voices at all.

King Zhuangxiang said with a smile, "Premier told me this morning that Shaolong will be leaving in a few day's time to help me capture Zhao Mu so that I can vent my hatred. Both Empress Ji and I are very touched so we must invite

Shaolong over immediately for a meal as a boost to your journey.”

Xiang Shaolong felt a great liking towards King Zhuangxiang because not only is he gentle, but there is a sincerity about him that comes from the bottom of his heart.

Maybe because he was held hostage in Zhao for a long period of time and suffered humiliation there, he did not have the haughty air of King Xiaocheng.

Just looking at how devoted he is towards Zhu Ji and his gratitude at Lu Buwei's help, combining forces with this great merchant to deal with his own countrymen, one can tell how much importance he places on relationships.

And there's another reason why Xiang Shaolong feels especially for him.

In this world, he is the only one who knows that the leader of the world's strongest state, only has three more years to live.

He hurriedly bowed his head and gave his thanks.

King Zhuangxiang suddenly said kindly, “My son has something to say?”

Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei's eyes turned towards Xiao Pan and the look in their eyes were filled with unending love like King Zhuangxiang as well.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing, all these three people treated Xiao Pan like their precious son, but he's actually a fake.

At the same time he was shocked. Xiao Pan must have heard the killer of his mother, Zhao Mu's name and hence revealed a strange look of alarm which was witnessed by King Zhuangxiang.

Xiao Pan looked at Xiang Shaolong and said with disappointment, "Grand Tutor has to leave without even having any chance to teach me anything."

The three of them laughed.

Zhu Ji furrowed her pretty brows, "Will this be too much of a risk for Grand Tutor?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "The more dangerous it is, the more suited it is for me. Do not worry Empress Ji, I will be careful."

Lu Buwei chuckled, "I am very confident of Shaolong and knows that he will certainly succeed."

King Zhuangxiang loves Xiao Pan a lot and said to him with a smile, "I am extremely happy that my son respects and loves his tutor so much." He turned towards Xiang Shaolong and added, "If Grand Tutor is free these few days, you can spend more time in the Palace to teach the Crown Prince. The way you blocked Wang Jian's three arrows at the square yesterday, my son was so excited that he kept telling everyone about it!"

Xiang Shaolong can't help but exchange a look with Xiao Pan and secretly exclaim that he's formidable. By doing this now, if this lad becomes especially close towards him in future, no one will suspect that it's due to any other hidden reasons. He agreed politely immediately.

King Zhuangxiang sighed and said, "I had a hard life in the past and was downtrodden in Handan, humiliated and looked down upon. I've never had the chance to study properly and have to live everyday in fear, wondering if I will survive the next day. That's why the first thing I want to do for my son after his return to Xianyang is to find him good tutors, so that he..."

Zhu Ji pouted and stared at him, saying coquettishly, "Your Majesty got more than ten people to teach the Crown Prince in turns at one go, I'm really worried that Zheng'er will be exhausted."

King Zhuangxiang smiled, not at all unhappy that she has interrupted his words.

Lu Buwei chuckled, "Does Empress Ji wants to listen to my grand plan of tutoring Prince Zheng?"

The four of them looked towards him in surprise at the same time.

Lu Buwei looked at Xiao Pan with the eyes of a 'benign father' before turning to King Zhuangxiang and said, "As the saying goes, ask when in doubt, learn when unskilled. Learned scholars, military swordsmen, weren't they all ignorant initially and made achievements through learning

and practice. Since that is the case, all the more a leader will have to study.”

King Zhuangxiang was stunned, “Does Premier Lu think that the education plan I have arranged for my son is not enough? The people that I have invited to teach my son are all the best in their own fields. For example Qin Qing’s poetry, song and music are not only the best in Great Qin, but she’s also admired by others in the six states and is on par with Wei’s Learned Lady Ji. Could Premier have an even better candidate?”

Only now did Xiang Shaolong realize that Widow Qing’s surname is Qin and she’s also one of the Crown Prince’s Grand Tutors. No wonder Emperor Qin in future, heh! Which means Xiao Pan, will build a ‘Memorial of Qing Dais’ in praise of this female tutor of his.

Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan looked at Lu Buwei curiously, waiting to see how he is going to reply King Zhuangxiang.

Lu Buwei said confidently, “As the Crown Prince, Prince Zheng of course need not fear no one will teach him. However going to extremes is not good as well and sometimes when there are too many different views, one may be at a loss as to how to proceed. So in view of this point, I have summoned the world’s learned, capable, skilled and amazing people to gather and give their opinions on governing a country, from the principles of governing to farming and their conclusions will be written into a book which will cover every topic. When the book is completed,

once the Crown Prince has it on hand, then there will be nothing he does not know.

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed, for this 'son' of his, Lu Buwei really went into a lot of trouble.

King Zhuangxiang chuckled, "To think that Premier can think of such an idea. If Premier needs any help, just let me know!"

Lunch passed amid such light-hearted and warm atmosphere.

After the meal King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji returned to their Palace to rest and Lu Buwei, as the Premier, is also a very busy man and does not have the time for long chats. Xiang Shaolong told him about the attack on his way here and he left hurriedly after listening to the account, leaving only Xiang Shaolong who led Xiao Pan to the square to practice his swordplay.

Xiao Pan is no longer the same boy and no matter where he goes there'll be a big group of imperial guards and palace maids accompanying him and the two of them could not even talk about what's in their hearts.

Before they started the sparring, Xiao Pan can't help but ask quietly, "Teacher! Can you not go to Handan? Without you, I will have nothing left."

Xiang Shaolong saw that even the guards nearest to them were about five feet away so he pretended to correct his swordplay and asked, "Did they treat you well?"

Xiao Pan's eyes reddened as he said, "Very well! I really treat them as my birth parents."

Xiang Shaolong reprimanded him, "This will be the last time you think of yourself as Xiao Pan. From this moment on, even when in front of me, you will be Ying Zheng."

Xiao Pan understood and nodded his head before asking again, "Can you not go?"

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "Remember our gentleman's agreement, Zhao Mu is mine, the King of Zhao is yours."

As he finished his words, he slashed his sword across.

Xiao Pan jumped aside agilely and struck a pose.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly shocked on seeing this.

This lad has something that he never had before, and that is great confidence, which made a great change to his manner.

Damn!

This is the giant who will unify the world and become China's first Emperor in future.

Once he thought of this, a rush of uncontrollable feelings seem to well up from his heart.

Right at this time an attendant came to announce that Qin Qing is here.

Although Xiang Shaolong very much wanted to take a look at this Widow Qing whose fame is on par with Ji Yanran, to see

how beautiful and delicate she is. However he has no excuse to do so and it's not something within courteous norms. Besides, Xiao Pan had to bath and change so he had to return to the Wu residence.

He had just stepped through the door when the guard came to report that Wang Jian has come to look for him and is now chatting with Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang at the main hall, so he hurried in.

Wang Jian was joyous when he saw Xiang Shaolong and came forward to hold his hand in greeting.

Xiang Shaolong saw that he was dressed in an ordinary warrior's outfit that exuded a strong military air and can't help but feel a sense of camaraderie as he replied earnestly, "Sorry to have made Brother Wang wait so long!"

Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang stood up and the former said, "Grand Tutor Wang is here to bid farewell to Shaolong."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Farewell?"

Wang Jian replied excitedly, "Yes! I am setting off to the northern frontier immediately to go to war with the Xiongnu⁵."

⁵ The Xiongnu (Chinese, 匈奴; pinyin, Xiōngnú; Wade-Giles, Hsiung-nu) were a confederation of nomadic tribes from Central Asia with a ruling class of unknown origin. The bulk of information on the Xiongnu comes from Chinese sources. What little is known of their titles and names comes from Chinese transliterations from their language. [source, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiongnu>]

Xiang Shaolong felt uncomfortable and secretly thought that if he is going to battlefield, he'll need the consent of King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei.

Ever since Shang Yang's reforms in Qin, the tribe's leadership power was wrestled away and they lost the right to succession. Governmental and noble ranks were granted based on military contributions. Any reassignment of more than 50 soldiers will require the approval of the King of Qin. This was an unprecedented move at that time. This made the central pillar of Qin power reach its peak.

All the great generals only hold one half of the token and without the King of Qin's other half of the token, it'll be difficult to reassign troops. Besides the military token, the King of Qin's written document stamped with his imperial seal is also needed before it is recognized.

Therefore it is a lot more difficult to rebel in Qin as compared to the other countries.

Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang knows that the two of them have things to say so they gave an excuse and left.

After the two of them sat down, Xiang Shaolong ordered the maids to serve scented tea as he wondered if Lu Buwei is so intolerant after all and deliberately transferred Wang Jian away so that he would not be able to fight with him for attention. Once he thought of this, he felt greatly apologetic.

Wang Jian asked quizzically, "Why do Brother Xiang suddenly look so terrible?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed and said, "Brother Wang has just been promoted to the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor and now you have been transferred away. I feel injustice for you. No! I must speak to his Majesty on Brother Wang's behalf."

Wang Jian is a man with both brains and brawn. He was stunned for a moment before he suddenly understood and he was touched, saying, "Only now do I know that Brother Xiang really cares for me. But you've misunderstood, I was the one who spoke about this mission to his Majesty. Hai! To tell you the truth, seniority and experience plays a huge part in the military. Without some personal connections, one can forget about thinking of leading an army into battle. This time they did not want Brother Xiang to get the position of Grand Tutor so they had no choice but to get me out to duel with Brother Xiang. Now my status is no longer the same. When I met his Majesty this morning, he asked me what wish do I have and I immediately said I would like to offer my services at the northern frontier. After discussion with Premier Lu, His Majesty asked me again the strategy I have in mind and he then gave me the token on the spot and let me be the main commander at the northern frontier. This has always been my dream and I did not expect it to come true. I am here to tell you the good news and to thank you as well."

This time it is Xiang Shaolong's turn to be stunned. For a long time, the Xiong Nus and the Hus have been trying to invade the borders of Qin, Zhao and Yan and the three states, in order to gain control of central plains, have always used the

method of building long walls along the border to keep them at bay but there's still nothing they can do to the strong nomadic groups that travel around the high Mongolian plains.

Therefore every thinks that it is an arduous and thankless task to go into battle with Xiong Nus, and one may very well lose his life if he's unlucky.

The Xiong Nus are nomadic and have hard lives therefore they are especially predatory. Using the advantage of the speed of their cavalry, their strategy is to attack when the enemy is retreating and retreat when the enemy is attacking. They frequently encroach into Central Plains and attack and pillage the various states whose main concentration is on farming.

And Qin is exactly one of the states facing this problem.

When Li Mu offended the King of Zhao, he was reassigned to the northern border and everyone knows that it is a form of punishment. Therefore, how could he have expected that it was Wang Jian who volunteered and begged to be reassigned to the northern border?

Looking at how concerned Xiang Shaolong is, Wang Jian said with a smile, "I can't blame Brother Xiang for not understanding. Ever since I was young, my thinking has always been different from others."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved and now he became curious as he asked, "Why don't Brother Wang tell me about it?"

Wang Jian drank the scented tea in one gulp before replying seriously, “I have always admired King Wuling of Zhao⁶. If not for his great bravery in implementing the two reforms, the state of Zhao not only became one of the stronger states and he also changed the way of fighting battles in the world.”

Xiang Shaolong has long heard of this story and he nodded his head in agreement, “Is Brother Wang referring to his Hu uniform and horse archery?”

Wang Jiang became excited, “Exactly. At that time the clothes of the Zhaos had long sleeves, thick belts, wide collars and huge bottoms. Such long and huge robes is extremely inconvenient when horse riding or archery. Therefore King Wuling ignored the country’s senior officials old fashioned arguments about it being ‘against the people’s hearts that rules are changed’ and ordered the whole army to change into Hu uniform. The huge sleeves and long robes were changed into a refreshing look with smaller sleeves with short coats, belts and boots.”

On hearing this, Xiang Shaolong thought it was interesting as well and said with a laugh, “This reform affects their reputation and the change in society, and naturally there will be strong opposition to it.”

⁶ King Wuling of Zhao (Traditional Chinese, 趙武靈王, Simplified Chinese, 赵武灵王) (? - 295 BCE, reigned 325 BCE - 299 BCE) reigned in the State of Zhao during the Warring States Period of Chinese history. His reign was famous for one important event, the reforms consisting of "Wearing Barbarian Uniform and the Use of Cavalry in Battle" (Simplified Chinese, 胡服骑射, Traditional Chinese, 胡服騎射).

[source, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Wuling_of_Zhao]

Wang Jian gave a cold snort, "Compared to dying for the country, what is this little reform?"

He continued, "Another more thorough reform is to abandon the method of using carriages as the main force of attacks and change to using cavalry as the main force of attacks. In a short time he built up a huge and strong team of cavalry who not only swept the Xiong Nus but also Central Plains, becoming invincible and numerous generals gained fame. If not because of the appearance of that muddleheaded King Xiaocheng, we might not even win the battle of Changping even if we have Bai Qi, the unparalleled military genius with us."

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened, "Therefore you want to go to the northern frontier to follow in King Wuling's footsteps and bring a whole new change."

Wang Jian smiled confidently, "Although I am experienced in battles, I've always been on the frontlines and never had the chance to lead an army. When will I ever have the chance if we're fighting the other states in the east and south. Therefore I volunteered so that I can have a taste of leading an army. At the same time I can practice my horse archery and find some Xiong Nus to sharpen my sword with."

He continued in a low voice, "At that time King Wuling swept a thousand miles across the land and he took over the territory of the Linhu people. Those Linhu who are good in horse archery also became Zhao's cavalry, which greatly increased their strength. I've always had this idea as well."

This is called killing two birds with one stone. As long as we don't get rid of the Xiong Nus, how can we talk about unifying the world?"

Xiang Shaolong reached out and placed his hand on his shoulder and said with sincerity, "Brother Wang is indeed an extraordinary man to be able to think of so many advantages from a task that everyone regards as torturous. Your precious sword and arrows will definitely lead the way when the time comes in future to unify the world."

This is the first time Wang Jian met a person who did not say that he is an idiot. He raised his hand and grabbed his arm tightly and said with gratitude, "Brother Xiang is the extraordinary man instead, the only reason I have this day..."

Xiang Shaolong interrupted him, "If you mention that again, then you're not treating me as your brother."

Wang Jian's eyes reddened as he said earnestly, "Brother Xiang, please do not think that I am regarding myself highly. The mission to conquer the north this time is fraught with danger and I might not even come back alive. I came here today.... Hai!"

Xiang Shaolong saw him hesitating and asked curiously, "If Brother Wang has anything to say, please go right ahead!"

Wang Jian blushed as he said, "Actually I have been impressed with Brother Xiang once I met you, I wonder if we can become sworn brothers. We will share weal and woe together in future, if there is any ounce of deceit, may I be destroyed by heaven and earth."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed joyously, "I should be the one who is not good enough. But I have three other loyal friends, why don't we copy how Liu, Guan and Zhang sworn brotherhood at the peach garden and let our names go down in history as loyal brothers."

Wang Jian was confused, "You're talking about what Liu, Guang and Zhang about sworn brotherhood at what peach?"

This time it was Xiang Shaolong's turn to feel greatly embarrassed. Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei's sworn brotherhood happened during the era of the Three Kingdoms so naturally Wang Jian has never heard of this.

He immediately gave some nonsensical answers and muddled his way through. He found Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo and the four of them, together with a recovering Jing Jun, made the serious vow of brotherhood together at Jing Jun's bedside.

A big feast followed it before Wang Jian left happily.

That night Xiang Shaolong was in a great mood and had fun with Wu Tingfang and the rest, throwing aside all his worries and his lovesickness for Ji Yanran for the time being.

Suddenly, Xiang Shaolong felt as if he is at the happiest and proudest moment of his life.

As soon as he fetches Ji Yanran back to Xianyang and capture Zhao Mu, then he will have nothing more to ask for.

CHAPTER 7

Love At The Qin Palace

[Translated by JEAN]

THE NEXT MORNING, Tu Xian's best advisor Xiao Yuetan came to look for Xiang Shaolong. The two of them sat in the small hall in the inner courtyard and Xiao Yuetan said, "It was the Premier who asked me to look for Grand Tutor, to see if there's anything I can be of help."

Xiang Shaolong had too much fun last night and drank a little too much as well so he replied with a heavy head, "There's no need for Mister to be so polite, just call me Shaolong. No matter what rank I hold, we're still friends who have been

through thick and thin so we can speak as equals.” At the same time he tried to figure out the reason he has come.

Xiao Yuetan saw that he did not put on any airs at all and was secretly overjoyed. After expressing his humbleness, he told him the reason for the visit, “It’s to make it more convenient for Shaolong to work in Zhao. If you depend purely on trying to disguise yourself, not only is it troublesome but inappropriate as well. Therefore the Premier has ordered me to specially help Shaolong, Xiao Jun, Brother Teng and Brother Wu make four exquisite masks based on the shape of your faces. You’ll just need to add some minor details like change the hairstyle and color and I guarantee that you’ll be able to hide from Zhao Mu. Of course! Shaolong and the others will still have to work on your voices and mannerisms, otherwise you’ll still be recognized.”

Xiang Shaolong felt as if he has just woke up from a dream and asked happily, “Premier indeed thinks of everything, I wonder if you’ve brought the things here.”

Xiao Yuetan proudly took down the little package he has carrying on his back and opened it, and indeed there are four masks inside.

He took out one of them to let Xiang Shaolong wear it and immediately Xiang Shaolong turned into a coarse looking man with a face full of beard.

Xiao Yuetan reached out with his fingers and started touching the area around his eyes and said with a smile,

“The most unique thing about this design is that the connecting parts are mostly at where the hair is. For example the hole here which reveals your eyes, not only has it made your eyebrows thicker, but it also made the shape of your eyes rounder so even for those who knows you, they won’t be able to recognize you from the shape of your eyes. As for the rest of the connecting parts, just apply a layer of powdered oil and it’ll be seamless.”

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly took a copper mirror for a look and was extremely impressed.

Xiao Yuetan took out a chalk and made some markings on the mask before removing it for him, saying “The mask still need some refining, I’ll be able to hand it over within three days.”

Xiang Shaolong replied with astonishment, “Mister Xiao is indeed gifted in your art, you’re able to make such a well-fitted mask based only on your memory. What material is this?”

Naturally Xiao Yuetan was overjoyed that someone found him impressive and he replied happily, “This is made from a precious beast called ‘leopard deer’ from the northwest. It’s a little larger than hunting dogs and extremely rare. I collected them at a high price and only managed to get four skins and now I’ve used them all up at one go.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that such a rare beast that he’s never even heard of before most likely became extinct because of Xiao Yuetan. After thanking him, he called for

Teng Yi and the rest to let them try on the masks to see if any changes need to be made.

Teng Yi and the rest all expressed admiration for the masks and they became more excited about the trip to Handan.

Jing Jun's physique is so good that it's unbelievable. He was able to move freely in just a few days, but of course he still cannot turn somersaults.

When Xiao Yuetan removed the mask for Teng Yi, he asked in bewilderment, "Has Brother Teng encountered some joyous event, why have your whole countenance changed?"

For the first time Teng Yi blushed as he hemmed and hawed his way though. Neither does he dare to look at the others in the eyes.

After Xiao Yuetan wrapped everything up, he lowered his voice and said, "About the ambush on Shaolong yesterday on the streets, Premier has already sent someone to investigate. They should be from Weinan Martial Arts School, because two of their warriors passed away coincidentally yesterday and they carried out the funeral secretly."

Once he said that, everyone knows in their hearts that Tu Xian has bribed someone from the martial arts school, otherwise how else would he know such tightly guarded news.

Xiao Yuetan added, "But Premier would like to ask Shaolong to tolerate this for the time being, because he already has an

even better plan which can get rid of Lord Yangquan and Qiu Risheng at one go, so he would not want to put them on their guard at this juncture.”

Jing Jun was furious, “They come and deal with us as and when they like, sooner or later someone will be killed by them!”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Lu Buwei is getting more and more formidable, no longer is he intent on just getting a moment’s revenge. This type of ruthlessness indeed makes one’s heart run cold and after stopping Jing Jun, he said, “Mister Xiao, please tell the Premier not to worry, we know what to do.”

Obviously Xiao Yuetan is on good terms with Jing Jun and he pulled him aside to explain and guarantee that they will not let Qiu Risheng and his men off before leaving the Wu residence.

They discussed the problem of security for the Wu family and came up with a plan. Xiang Shaolong told them, “All of you get ready, once we get the masks three days later, we’ll depart immediately.”

He turned towards Teng Yi and said with a laugh, “Brother Teng! Better thoroughly enjoy the next few precious days!”

Teng Yi said with a wry smile, “Even you’re making fun of me!”

At this point in time an attendant came and informed that the Empress has summoned Xiang Shaolong to enter the Palace immediately.

Xiang Shaolong obeyed the order with consternation and left the residence.

Naturally this time he brought along a huge entourage of Wu family warriors, not like the last time when he traveled alone.

After Zhu Ji ordered the maids and attendants to leave, only Zhu Ji, Xiao Pan and Xiang Shaolong was left in the huge pavilion in the imperial garden. Even the guards who are nearest to them are at least ten feet away and they can only see, but not hear them.

With Xiao Pan around, naturally Xiang Shaolong is not worried that Zhu Ji would try to 'entice' him.

That would have been a huge headache for him.

Zhu Ji filled up the wine cup that was on the stone table for him and after trying to get him to drink, her pretty face blushed from the wine she's drunk, making her look even more alluring.

This beauty indeed has the charisma to fall a city and her charm makes one think of the term beauties are a source of trouble, especially when Xiang Shaolong remembers what will befall her in future.

Zhu Ji's expression turned serious and she said earnestly, "I asked Shaolong here today with his Majesty's approval, to

allow us mother and son to express our gratitude. Now I have no other wants, my only wish is to groom Zheng'er so that he can be a good ruler in future." Her gaze moved towards Xiao Pan, revealing a look of motherly love.

She added in a low voice, "Luckily this child has not disappointed me!"

Xiao Pan's eyes reddened slightly and moved closer to Zhu Ji. Xiang Shaolong understood.

This is very reasonable. Even though Zhu Ji is a natural flirt, but after staying in Handan for so many years where she can be used by anyone, she is long tired of such life.

Therefore she is especially treasures the new life with her husband and son, or at least this is what she is feeling for now.

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head, "Shaolong understands what Empress Ji is thinking about."

Zhu Ji took a deep look at him before turning to look at the pretty garden scene surrounding them. She finally gave a satisfied sigh and said, "I know you understand me the most. Seeing you, is not only like seeing a friend, but it's like seeing family and there's no need to hide anything from you. If you encounter any problems, don't be afraid to tell me. Some things will be easier if I speak to his Majesty instead of asking Premier to report on your behalf."

Xiang Shaolong has no idea how sincere her words were, but with her current status, it's indeed out of the norm that she would say something like that.

Zhi Ji tapped Xiao Pan's shoulder and said, "Zheng'er! Grand Tutor Qin is here, go quickly!"

Xiao Pan stood up reluctantly and followed the attendant who was standing far away. Xiang Shaolong knows that the time for fleshly conquests is here and waited quietly.

Zhu Ji rolled her eyes at him and said, "I did not put on the airs of an Empress in front of you, why won't you try to speak even a little more?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that there's only the two of them here and replied with a relaxed laugh, "It's beneficial for both Empress Ji and me to conduct ourselves as befitting to a ruler and his official."

Zhu Ji smiled, "Between us, we need not spell out a lot of things, but I'm really very grateful to you. Hai! If I had known, I should have given you my body while we were still in Handan, at least we'll leave a beautiful memory behind. Now in order to become a good Empress and mother, all personal desires will have to be placed aside. I hope Shaolong can understand my heart."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect that even after Zhu Ji became the Empress of Qin, she is still so direct with her choice of words. Obviously a leopard can never change its spots.

For a moment he could not think of a topic to talk about.

Zhu Ji pouted slightly, "Look at you! Became a mute again!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled wryly, "What can I say? Should I express happiness or unhappiness."

Zhu Ji said offhandedly, "I think you're mostly happy, because you need not fear that I will implicate you."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling hilarious. Women are so strange. She's the one who tells you not to get involved with her, but when you really did not try to entice her, she'll feel unhappy instead, how contradictory.

Zhu Ji is aware that she has gone a little overboard so she sighed and her expression turned icy after that, "Shaolong's trip back to Handan this time, can you help me kill two people?"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and looked at her as he replied, "Go ahead!"

Zhu Ji seemed to have turned into another person, her eyes filled with murderous intent as she uttered each word slowly, "The first one is another of Zhao Mu's lackey Le Cheng, but don't ask me why, I don't even wish to think about it."

Xiang Shaolong knows that she must have been greatly humiliated by this person, otherwise her hatred would not have been so deep so he nodded, "I'll definitely get this done for you!"

A little of the murderous look went out as Zhu Ji's eyes revealed a look of gentleness and her pretty lips uttered,

“But forget about it if it’s too dangerous, most important thing is for you to return safely. Without you, Zhu Ji will feel that I’ve lost a good confidante. Ever since I first saw you, I’ve felt that even if you do not become my lover, you will become my good friend.”

Xiang Shaolong is starting to be confused.

Are her words truly from the bottom of her heart, or just a way to pull him over to her side?

He has seen how she can charm Zhao Mu and Guo Kai silly so he’s very guarded.

But of course on the surface he pretended to be touched.

However he could not hide it from her and Zhu Ji pouted, “Did you think I was lying to you? Heaven above be my witness, if I, Zhu Ji speaks even a word of falsehood, I will not have a good end!”

Xiang Shaolong was startled and hurriedly said, “Lower your voice, it’ll be terrible if someone else hears this!”

Zhu Ji stared at him and said with a huff, “Coward! Do you believe me now!”

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head helplessly and sighed, “Who is the other person? Guo Kai?” Then he shook his head and added, “Of course it’s not him, otherwise Empress Ji would have forced me to kill him the other day!”

Zhu Ji was still fuming as she replied icily, “At least you know how to use your brains, of course it’s not Guo Kai. Amongst

those hateful people, he can be considered one of the nicest to me.”

Xiang Shaolong was curious and asked, “Stop trying to be mysterious, tell me quickly!”

Zhu Ji covered her mouth and smiled as she said playfully, “Does it mean that no matter who is the person I say, you will follow my instructions to kill?”

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted, “You still said that I was your confidante, why do you always want to see me embarrassed and in a spot?”

Zhu Ji’s heart softened and she replied with a coquettish smile, “All right! I’ll not put you in a spot, the other person is... is...”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, “Do you want me to beg you before you’ll tell me?”

Zhu Ji lowered her head and when she raised it again, tears flowed from the corner of her eyes as she said piteously, “When his Majesty and Premier Lu escaped from Handan and Zhao Mu found out about it, he sent Le Cheng and a big group of ferocious men who dashed into our house. They killed all the men servants while the women were all gang raped. That violent and horrible scene is still fresh in my mind even now. Even if I don’t think about it in the day, the terrible scene will be reenacted in my dreams. The person who gave the orders was Le Cheng, do you think he deserves to be killed?”

Hot blood rushed through Xiang Shaolong's veins as an icy, murderous look gleamed in his eyes.

Zhu Ji lowered her head and continued, "The next day that fake son of mine and I was taken to Zhao Mu's place and placed under house arrest. Those few days were the most disgusting in my life and at that time I made a blood vow that if I can escape in future, I'll definitely avenge this."

Xiang Shaolong reminded her, "You have yet to say who the other person is!"

Zhu Ji said lightly, "It's Zhao Ya!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "What?"

Zhu Ji asked coldly, "Why? Can't bear to strike now!"

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand why she was trying to convince him earlier. He was feeling very uncomfortable and asked in a low voice, "What has she actually done?"

Zhi Ji actually chuckled and laughed daintily. She said as she shook with mirth, "I was lying to you, I just detest that hateful look of yours when you were unmoved towards me, that's why I used Zhao Ya to scare you." Her pretty face turned frosty as she added, "But other than this, the other things were all true. If the situation permits, bring me Le Cheng's head! Just take it that I'm begging you!"

Looking at her beautiful face filled with sad tears, Xiang Shaolong only feels as if his head is getting heavier. This woman is really difficult to deal with. It seems that Heaven

sent her to this world so that she can toy around with men, no wonder even Zhao Mu cannot bear to kill her.

Zhu Ji lifted her sleeves to wipe her tears and said quietly, "Be careful! If it's anyone else, I'll definitely say that I can guarantee him wealth and riches. But I know that you're an extraordinary man who holds no regard for fame at all, so I can only express my gratitude to you. But if you have any request, as long as you tell me, I will definitely try my very best to do it for you."

She suddenly smiled faintly, "For example the world's most beautiful Widow Qing, does Shaolong want me to introduce you to her? I don't believe that she can resist your charms."

Xiang Shaolong stared at her without humor and he stood up and said, "If Empress Ji do not have any further instructions, then please excuse me for I have to return home to prepare for the trip to Handan."

Zhu Ji looked at him forlornly and stood up as she said, "You're so hard handed to keep using the Handan trip to put pressure. I have no choice but to let you go."

She added with a smile, "But that is exactly what I like about you. Hai! It won't be easy to find a chance like this in future where I can talk with you openly."

Xiang Shaolong was touched on hearing this.

Zhu Ji has only become an Empress for a short time so she still retained her past characteristics. Earlier, it was only at

the beginning that she looked confident but she subconsciously later reverted to her flirting ways.

No matter! There is now a huge chasm between them that cannot be crossed and regardless of how much they admire each other, they can only keep it in their hearts in future.

The two of them faced each other quietly for a moment before Xiang Shaolong bid farewell.

CHAPTER 8

Audacity

[Translated by JEAN]

THE ATTENDANT led Xiang Shaolong away from the Imperial Garden, walking along the corridors, passing through buildings and gardens towards the Outer Palace.

Along the way guards were posted everywhere, obviously security has been tightened since his last visit.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed, was the Qin Palace being prepared for some changes?

He thought of how Lord Yangquan first wounded Jing Jun, then found people to openly ambush him in the streets. His actions can be considered uncontrolled so it's not strange if he were to rebel. The only question is how many in the Qin military stands on his side!

Of course he's not worried.

History books have already stated that before Emperor Qin rejected Lu Buwei, he has always remained undefeated, and that will only happen ten years later.

Just as he was lost in thoughts, Xiao Pan's voice was heard coming from his left, "Grand Tutor Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong turned towards the direction of the voice in surprise to see Xiao Pan running out from single log cabin with bamboos planted outside, past the grass field, towards the corridor.

The attendants and guards hurriedly fell to their knees in fright.

Xiang Shaolong was still deciding if he's supposed to kneel since he is the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor when Xiao Pan cried out, "Grand Tutor, dispense with ceremony!" and at the same time made an eye at him.

Xiang Shaolong was sharp enough and walked to a corner with him and asked with his brows furrowed, "Aren't you supposed to be having lessons?"

Xiao Pan panted as he replied, "I know that Grand Tutor will pass by this area, so I've been keeping an eye out."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is there anything you want to say?"

Xiao Pan was about to speak when a sweet but furious sounding lady's voice rose up from behind them, "Crown Prince!"

The two of them were feeling guilty and they were both startled as they turned to look at where the voice came from.

They saw an extremely beautiful and slender lady with her hair adorned with a sparrow pin, hair swaying as she walked and wearing a long white robe, seemingly glittering under the rays of sunlight. Her steps light, she seems to be floating on the lush green grass as she walked towards them, her movements elegant, as if she's a beautiful goddess who has come down to earth. Especially when the wide sleeves at her side was fluttering as she walked, which emphasized even more strongly her gracefulness.

Even more startling was her facial features, which has a rare purity seldom seen in this era, like a carved statue. Her eyes were clear and bright, her cheekbones were a little too high but when coupled with her straight nose, it gives one the feeling of uncommon grace, an elegance that makes one's heart shudder, making others feel that she is a woman with her own mind, a determined beauty.

Her dainty brows were long and curved towards her temples, showing how dark and shiny her pupils were.

Her phoenix eyes and dainty brows has an air of classical beauty and this is the first time Xiang Shaolong has seen such allure and uniqueness.

Even with Xiang Shaolong's immovable attitude towards women now, he still can't help but feel his heart lurch.

Her pert bosom, slender waist, long legs, all gave her an air of dignity that is beyond any of the other women in this era. When compared to Ji Yanran they both have their winning ways and it's difficult to compare who is the better.

But at this point in time her pretty face was tight, cold as frost, her expression stern as she stared at Xiao Pan, "Ask if ignorant, learn if unable to perform, listen to scholars if unable to learn, this has been the way since time memorial. Crown Prince, you are so easily distracted and has no heart in your studies, how will you rule the country and the people in future?"

Xiao Pan is after all still a child so naturally he hid behind Xiang Shaolong in fright, and it became a situation where it seems the two Grand Tutors were having a confrontation.

The attendants who were leading the way were so frightened they retreated to one side, afraid of being implicated.

The guards around them averted their eyes, pretending that they did not see anything at all.

Although Qin Qing was furious, her expression is a chilly calm, her breathing even, her hands behind her back. She

lifted her head to look Xiang Shaolong who was half a head taller than her and asked gently, "This is the Grand Tutor Xiang that Crown Prince Zheng has been talking about all the time?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at her pure and regal expression and cleared his mind of his imagination before replying with a straight face, "It is indeed I, and I would appreciate Grand Tutor Qin kind advices."

Qin Qing smiled slightly, "Grand Tutor Xiang is being too polite! Crown Prince! Aren't you going to walk out, a man must dare to admit to his actions, and take responsibility."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "It's not that serious, right?"

Qin Qing's expression turned icy as she replied, "There is a big problem with Grand Tutor Xiang's words. It is just a small matter to slip away from studies, but to cower on seeing someone, when he becomes the ruler in future and still has such a disposition, how can he handle the country's affairs? If Grand Tutor Xiang only knows how to protect and abide with the Crown Prince, how can you answer to his Majesty who has bestowed such an important task of teaching the Crown Prince?"

Xiang Shaolong answered with a wry smile, "Don't make it sound so serious, all right? Take it that I'm at fault, I'll wave the white flag and surrender, all right?" He reached out and patted Xiao Pan who was still behind him and said, "Crown Prince Zheng! Come! Show Grand Tutor Qin how heroic and

manly you are by daring to admit to your actions and impress her!”

Qin Qing was dumbfounded on hearing that. How can a senior official talk like that, as if playing a fool.

Xiao Pan walked out on hearing that and stood next to Xiang Shaolong, puffing his chest out and sucking his stomach in, posing like a great man but his tiny face was trying to contain his laughter and he looked totally hilarious.

Qin Qing’s eyes settled on Xiao Pan’s face and seeing how his little face was puffed red from trying to control his laughter, can’t help but chuckled although she knows she must not laugh. She turned her head aside and covered her face with her sleeve.

On seeing that, how can Xiao Pan control himself any longer and started clutching his stomach and chortled.

Xiang Shaolong can’t help but laugh as well.

Laughter is the most contagious, especially in such a solemn environment, and the attendants and guards around them all were secretly smiling as well.

Qin Qing lowered her sleeve, revealing her face that was wiped of any trace of a smile and arched her delicate brows as she softly reprimanded, “Laughed enough?”

Xiao Pan and Xiang Shaolong were so stunned that they immediately looked serious and stood straight.

But once a can of laughter has been opened, it's difficult to control. Right now not only Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Pan's expressions looked strange, this pretty widow is not much better as she tried to look serious and chided, "No one since time memorial can become wise without studying. But not concentrating on one's studies is akin to not learning anything at all. Crown Prince Zheng should reflect on your behavior today. If you think that you cannot concentrate on your studies, Qin Qing can only resign from her post as Grand Tutor."

Xiao Pan hurriedly replied, "Grand Tutor Qin, Xiao Zheng will not dare to do so anymore, I guarantee there won't be a next time. Hai! What do I have to memorize again this time?"

Qin Qing is obviously a person who looks stern on the outside but softhearted on the inside. She sighed and said, "This time I only want you to earnestly reflect. All right! That's all for today."

She turned towards Xiang Shaolong and before she has a chance to speak, Xiang Shaolong has already bowed towards her suavely with respect, his movements especially splendid.

Qin Qing was dazed on seeing this and she lowered her head, avoiding his heated gaze and bowed slightly before turning around and left gracefully.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad.

At least he fulfilled a wish and saw this rare beauty who has not disappointed him. To him, this is enough.

The Xiang Shaolong now no longer has the mood to hunt for beauties, unlike when he 'just arrived'.

Xiang Shaolong returned to the Wu residence and his father-in-law Wu Yingyuan has just sent off a group of powerful men from the Qin court and was in high spirits.

These few days Wu Yingyuan has been active with his socializing strategy, continuously giving away song courtesans and fine horses to those Qins who hold influential positions in order to set a foundation for their intended long stay in Qin. Otherwise, even if they have the support of the King of Qin and Lu Buwei and won't face any huge problems, but if people keep giving them small problems, it's still enough of a headache.

Wu Yingyuan is a businessman and is well aware that regardless of nationality or status, everyone is chasing after wealth and fame. Therefore he emphasized on this point and in addition to his subtle methods, slowly made his way through the various obstacles.

Xiang Shaolong had an idea and followed Wu Yingxiong back to the great hall in the main building and after sitting down, told him about Xiao Yuetan's exquisite masks and added, "Initially I only planned to disguise myself as a merchant to sneak back to Handan and capture Zhao Mu in a surprise attack and be done with this matter. But these makes have greatly increased my confidence and I decided to go all out and do something great."

Wu Yingyuan is intelligent and he said with a laugh, "Money is no problem. Heh! When it comes to comparing wealth, I'm afraid Premier Lu is still not our match." He lowered his voice and added, "Do you want me to get you a batch of courtesans for you to present as gifts." He then chuckled, "I'm so silly, they might reveal your background."

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that no matter how shameless he is, he will not treat women as merchandise and give them away. He laughed, "I only need a herd of warhorses of the finest quality who will not reveal our backgrounds."

Wu Yingyuan was slightly taken aback, "You really intend to go all out?"

Xiang Shaolong was impressed that Wu Yingyuan can understand his intention from just this little bit of information and replied, "Father-in-law can really make inferences, I really intend to go all out and deal with King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu in order to give vent to the anger that has been stuck in my chest."

Wu Yingyuan breathed out a gush of cold air and said, "My good son-in-law, you are the bravest person I've ever known, but this time you've certainly placed your bet on the right thing. When the Wu family left Zhao we poisoned all the animals in our farms so that the Zhaos will face a shortage in the supply of warhorses. If you bring warhorses to trade with them, I guarantee that they will come to welcome you instead."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Not only am I going to do business with them, I even want them to allow me to set up a farm in place of the Wu family. Father-in-law is most familiar with this trade, what sort of background must we use so that the Zhaos will find most believable?"

Wu Yingyuan furrowed his brow and thought for a moment before he banged the table and cried out, "I've thought of something. At Xiashui in the state of Chu there is a person famous for breeding horses, called 'Horse Fanatic' Dong Zhuang. The reason I've thought of this person is because he was originally a Zhao but because his father Dong Ping offended some powerful person and the whole family escaped to the state of Chu. Dong Ping had actually become a minor official who rears horses but maybe because of his character, the Chus treated him marginally and after he lost his official post, he went to live quietly in the wilderness and concentrated on keeping horses. If Shaolong masquerades as his descendent, firstly there won't be much problem with your accent, secondly no one has ever seen Dong Kuang and you can use your identity as a Chu to trick Zhao Mu into believing that you're a Chu spy sent to help him. I really cannot think of a more suitable person other than him to masquerade as."

Xiang Shaolong cried out happily, "This is really ideal. Can Father-in-law transfer ten odd warhorses without any brandings so that I can pretend to be a generous herdsman?"

Wu Yingyuan grabbed his shoulder and chortled, "10 odd horses is not enough to claim generosity, you'll need at least a few hundred to a thousand, and they must be branded. Of course not with the character 'Wu' but with the character 'Dong', just let me take care of this matter."

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brow, "This matter can only be made known to Lu Buwei, otherwise if the Qins find out about it, they may secretly give warning and that will be terrible."

Wu Yingyuan shook his head, "It's best that we keep this from Lu Buwei as well, then there won't be any accidents at all. Don't worry! We don't have to be so open and herd a few hundred warhorses out of Qin's borders, I'll just need a few days to settle everything. However we'll need to work on the route so that the Zhaos will really think that you are going to Handan from Chu."

Xiang Shaolong thought that all these are very exciting and interesting and after discussing the details, went back to his residence.

When he passed by Teng Yi's place, he suddenly heard the sounds of swords and was startled so he went in. After the maids pointed the way to him, he found Teng Yi at the small back garden and it turns out that this person and Shanlan were engaged in a lover's swordplay.

Teng Yi saw Xiang Shaolong and a sincere expression came onto his face. After instructing Shanlan to practice with his subordinate, he pulled Xiang Shaolong aside and said

happily, "Last night was really splendid. All the misery and pain these past few months have been resolved. Now I only hope that Shanlan will be able to give me a son so that I can keep my Teng family line going so that I don't become the sinner responsible for destroying our Teng family line."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but laughed loudly and happily.

Teng Yi blushed and pretended to be furious, "If you laugh at me again, I'm going to get into a big fight with you."

Xiang Shaolong laughed even harder.

Teng Yi only shook his head.

The next day Xiang Shaolong led his pretty wives and maids, together with the almost recovered Jing Jun and Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and the team of Wu family's most elite warriors and went back to that peaceful farm at the outskirts.

Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang were handling all the other arrangements for the trip to Zhao.

Xiang Shaolong concentrated on spending time with his wives and concubines and when there's free time he'll intensify the training of the Wu family's 'Special Task Force' together with Teng Yi and the rest. Of course he did not forget to tell them all the background information they need to know about their fake identities so that they will not slip up.

15 days later Tao Fang came to the farm and told them that everything is ready.

In the large hall of the farm's main residence, everyone gathered together to listen to the latest news about Handan.

Tao Fang said, "Handan is suddenly getting very lively. For some unknown reason, Lord Longyang from Wei and Han's most influential official, the Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang have all gone to Handan. There must be something going on and it seems that the special envoy from Qi will be going there shortly as well. The situation is extremely interesting."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi turned to look at each other, both thought of a very serious problem.

Tao Fang's experience came with age and he has already thought of what the problem is and said with a sigh, "If Chu sent an envoy to Handan over this secret which we still know nothing about, although it may not blow the cover off your fake identities, you won't be able to pretend to Zhao Mu that you are the Chus he engaged to steal 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual'."

Teng Yi gave a cold laugh and using his finger in place of a sword, made an action of killing. It must be known that Chu is the furthest away from the state of Zhao and if they are fast enough, it's very possible that they can intercept the Chu envoy before he reaches Zhao.

Wu Zhuo said with a smile, "Leave this to me. In any case we need to send some people out to scout around first and to get into contact with Zhao Mu so that he can help smoothen

our way to King Zhuangxiang and let the Zhaos open the city gates to welcome us.”

He turned towards Tao Fang and added, “Is Zhao Mu back on good terms with that muddleheaded king already?”

Tao Fang sighed, “King Xiaocheng is honestly a muddleheaded ruler. News leaked out from the palace that that shameless Zhao Mu knelt outside the palace gates for only half a night and he allowed him to see him and in no time at all they were stuck together like glue again.”

He turned towards Xiang Shaolong and said, “Zhao Ya is a born slut, now she is back to her true colors and is wildly engaged with many handsome men and has gone back to her previous wild lifestyle.”

Xiang Shaolong remained silent. Tao Fang deliberately talked about this to make him give up. Hai! This slut really needs to be taught a good lesson before his hatred can be appeased. Once he thought of that, he secretly wondered if he still has feelings for her, otherwise why would he feel such hatred on hearing this news?

Tao Fang furrowed his brows in deep thought, “What are they planning?”

Jing Jun replied, “Of course they’re going to deal with us Qins.”

Teng Yi was momentarily stunned, “Xiao Jun you are addressing yourself as a Qin so soon.”

Jing Jun asked with embarrassment, “Is it inappropriate?”

Tao Fang laughed, "How can it be inappropriate, your Brother Teng was just not used to it."

Teng Yi shook his head with a wry smile and did not speak further.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that people of this era does not regard the country as strongly as their clan. Their thinking is a little like those who work in a big company in the 21st century. If they feel that there are no prospects and that they are capable, it's very normal for them to change to another company to work.

He asked Tao Fang, "Has Lu Buwei's power in Qin improved greatly?"

Tao Fang nodded his head in the affirmative and said calmly, "What Premier Lu lacks now is military contribution, but he dare not act rashly as he's afraid that he will be at a losing end if the Qins refuse to cooperate, then whatever little advantages that he has gained through you would have gone down the drain."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing sardonically. He's afraid it would be difficult for him to help in this aspect. Although during this warring states period, others will attack you even if you don't attack them but to ask him to lead an army to attack and take over cities, kill and set fire, he can never have the heart to do such things.

They discussed the mission again and decided that Wu Zhuo will set off immediately the next day to stop the Chu envoy from reaching Zhao before they returned to their residences.

Before he could step through the door, he heard Zhao Qian's voice in the hall lamenting, "Hai! My monthly cycle is here again!"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked still outside the door.

Wu Tingfang's voice replied, "It's getting on my nerves. I'm been taking tonics constantly but I'm still not pregnant."

Xiang Shaolong started to feel uneasy. Could something radioactive caused harm to his ability in this area when he came on the time machine? To the ladies, especially in this era where carrying on the family line is important, this will complete their happy family life but to him he does not think that it's really important at all.

The hall remained silent.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and sighed, and walked in.

20 days later, after Jing Jun has fully recovered, all of them set off secretly immediately and left the Qin border and after traveling one huge round, entered Zhao through the state of Qi.

Xiang Shaolong's planning is even more detailed than the past. He first sent out an envoy to hand over the formal document requesting to call on the King of Zhao over to the border guards. In a short while the bell on the watch tower of the Zhao army rang and the drawbridge was lowered and a few hundred Zhao soldiers rode out uniformly to welcome them.

Teng Yi gave an order and the 300 Wu family's 'elite troops', who are now disguised as teams of herdsman, stood outside the army camp to await the arrival of the Zhaos.

The leader of the Zhao soldiers who led the troops is Zhai Bian, about 30 years old, short and stout with an intelligent face and warm personality. He chortled with laughter once he saw them, "Mister Dong's name is astounding indeed and now that I've seen you, you're even better than what your reputation expounds you to be."

After going through civilities, Xiang Shaolong, with the accompaniment of Teng Yi and Jing Jun, led him to view the 1000 handsome horses they brought with them.

As a warrior, Zhai Bian naturally knows his stuff and as he was viewing the horses, he exclaimed in surprise, "The quality of this batch of warhorses is even better than the horses the Wu family used to rear."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly finding this hilarious and after expressing their modesty, he asked his man to take out an especially tall and handsome horse to give to Zhai Bian.

Naturally Zhai Bian's attitude became even warmer and he hurriedly opened the city gates wide and invited the team in grandly, saying as they moved along, "His Majesty is extremely happy to learn that Mister Dong is coming afar from Chu, especially now that our country is in dire need of warhorses, Mister has really come at the right time."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng, Jing exchanged looks, knowing that Wu Zhuo has accomplished his mission and has made vital contact with Zhao Mu.

That night Zhai Bian set up a feast to welcome them and during the feast asked them about the situation in Chu. They answered him with the stories that they have earlier agreed upon and both the host and guests enjoyed themselves.

The next morning Zhai Bian sent a commander to lead them towards Handan. They traveled during the day and rested at night and 20 days later, Xiang Shaolong finally returned to this great city that once brought him great sadness.

CHAPTER 9

Return To Handan

[Translated by JEAN]

HANDAN still looked as good.

Here to welcome them was their 'old friend' Bureaucrat Guo Kai, and also Wu Zhuo who has now changed his name to 'Di Ying'.

After a round of civilities and polite talk, all of them, together with the thousand warhorses, rode grandly into this ancient city which is the center of the Zhao's power.

Guo Kai rode next to Xiang Shaolong and said with a smile, "His Majesty is extremely impressed that Mister still thinks of your old country even though you're in Chu. He has specially set up a feast to welcome Mister tonight."

Xiang Shaolong was looking at the city scene with mixed feelings and on hearing that, he deepened his voice to make it sound hoarse, slowed his tempo and said, "I am really touched that his Majesty understands my intention. Hai! A person who has lost his country is like duckweed without roots. The pain is not something an outsider can understand."

Guo Kai turned slightly towards him and said, "I heard from Mister Di from your residence that Mister Dong intends to come back display your capabilities but I don't know if you're aware of the situation?"

Xiang Shaolong had an idea and he pretended to be obtuse yet sincere as he replied, "I only know how to rear horses and nothing else so I hope that Bureaucrat Guo can give me some advices and I will never forget your kindness."

Their strategy for this trip is to pretend to be stupid and ignorant to handle sly characters like Guo Kai.

Guo Kai chortled before he turned serious and said with a low voice, "I don't know why but once I saw you, I feel very happy. I wouldn't dare give advices but I will certainly try my best to help you fulfill your dreams."

Xiang Shaolong put on a show of extreme gratitude and said, "With Bureaucrat looking after me like this, I am much relieved. I wonder if there's anything I should take note of?"

Guo Kai replied very sincerely, "Over at his Majesty's side, I will help you with the affairs. But there are two people in Handan that you must be on your guard against, otherwise not only will you find your dreams difficult to fulfill, you may even end up in trouble and meet the same fate as Master Wu."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be extremely startled as he stared and stammered his reply, "I have no enmity with anyone at all, why would anyone want to harm me?"

However he was secretly laughing in his heart.

Guo Kai obviously think of him as a ignorant, brash man with a simple mind, that's why he used such a direct method to try and pull him over to his side so that he will be faithful and allow himself to be used.

From this he can tell that the King of Zhao intends to use him to replace Master Wu, that's why Guo Kai thinks that he is of value and worthy to be bought over.

Guo Kai's bright and sleazy eyes first scanned the surroundings and saw that the Zhao soldiers who are leading the way in front and Wu Zhuo and the rest who were behind are a 'safe' distance away before he lowered his voice to say, "The first person you have to be wary of is Guo Zhong. This person will now allow the appearance of another Master Wu."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head to indicate his understanding.

Guo Kai's words are not unreasonable; this is called 'a mountain cannot have two tigers'. But if he, 'Dong Kuang' wants to have as much wealth and power as what Master Wu had, it would take at least a few generations to accomplish it. Therefore Guo Kai is trying to scare him.

Guo Kai continued mysteriously, "The other person you have to be careful of is the Marquis of Julu, Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but exclaim hoarsely, "What?"

At that instant he understood that Guo Kai is unhappy to be under Zhao Mu and is looking for ways to topple him. But the way Guo Kai is revealing his inner thoughts to an outsider like him is really too careless and he can't help but feel suspicious.

Right then they arrived at the guesthouse that will be used to house them and surprisingly it turns out to be the Hostage Residence which used to be Zhu Ji and the fake Ying Zheng's prison.

Guo Kai smiled and did not continue talking as he accompanied them into the residence.

Guo Kai went through another round of nice talks and after accepting this valuable gift of 1000 fine horses that the Zhaos find themselves unable to reject, he went back to the Palace to report his duty done.

All of them went to the inner hall to listen to Wu Zhuo's report.

Wu Zhuo exhaled as he said, "We were indeed lucky, the Chus really sent an envoy and luckily I manage to waylay him and got a lot of useful information."

Teng Yi replied with understanding, "Eldest Brother, it has been hard on you!"

Among these five sworn brothers, Wu Zhuo is the oldest so he became the Eldest Brother, followed by Teng Yi, Xiang Shaolong, Wang Jian and the youngest brother Jing Jun.

Wu Zhuo nodded his head and said, "It was indeed difficult. Although we set up traps when capturing the Chu envoy, we still lost five of our brothers and more than ten others were injured, but this is something unavoidable."

Xiang Shaolong can imagine the danger and intensity at that time and asked, "Have you found out why they are coming to Handan?"

Wu Zhuo replied, "3rd Brother's way of tiring them out through questioning is really effective. That Chu envoy called Bai Dingnian could not hold on beyond three days and totally surrendered. He revealed the truth, it turns out that this matter involves Lord Dongzhou."

Everyone was excited.

Ever since King Wu created his empire 700 hundred years ago and used Duke Zhou's feudal system model, maybe this

can be described as a large family where generations after generations live together.

This big family is first led by a smart and hardworking founder and leading his few sons, worked hard together in adversity and creating a big patriarchal clan. The ruler and the various lords of differing surnames are usually connected through marriages.

The whole system of a feudal state is centralized around the family clan.

Just by deducing from this, one will know that it's only a matter of time that this empire will fall. The danger comes from two sides. Firstly the rule that the eldest son would succeed and once the successor is not the eldest, then there will be upheaval and King You⁷ of Zhou is the most obvious example.

Secondly, the original close relationships are slowly getting distant after a few generations and with the increase in population and the differences in the good and the bad, there will most certainly be some struggles or enmities formed and may even reach the state of a fight.

Once chaos ensued, no one will have the power to stop the natural turning of history's wheel. Once the royal family loses the power to control the lords, they will immediately

⁷ King You of Zhou (reigned 781 BC - 771 BC) (ch. 周幽王 Zhōu Yōu Wáng) was the twelfth sovereign of the Chinese Zhou Dynasty and the last of Western Zhou Dynasty.
[source, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_You_of_Zhou]

fall into the situation where the country is divided into rival baronies.

And the invasion by others have forced King Ping of Zhou to move east and this provided such an opportunity.

The status between a ruler and his followers are initially forged by power and when this power disappears, the status becomes just an empty title and the Zhou family's power totally disintegrated.

But such a crack appeared slowly, and it's not a sudden break.

Before the three states were separated, there were still some old relations left between the lords and the Zhou family so they were not overly defiant.

That's why for 300 years after King Ping moved to the east, respect and deference are still generally accorded to the Zhou family.

After the three states were separated, there was still no situation where those not from the royal family oversteps his authority and tried to usurp the position. But the authority of the Zhou family was further weakened and their power reduced. However Lord Dongzhou is still the leader of the lords in name.

Now Lord Dongzhou is making use of everyone's fear towards Qin to launch a last fight and indeed this is something that cannot be brushed off easily.

Wu Zhuo continued, "The secret envoy Lord Dongzhou sent is called Ji Zhong. If he manages to get the alliance of the six states, Qi, Chu, Yan, Zhao, Wei and Han, Qin will be faced with extremely dire situation and now it seems that chances of success is quite high."

Teng Yi looked at Xiang Shaolong and said, "We must try and sabotage this matter, otherwise it'll be difficult for Lu Buwei to keep his position as Premier."

Xiang Shaolong immediately felt his head getting heavier.

Teng Yi's words are very reasonable. After all Lu Buwei got his position as Premier because of King Zhuangxiang and it's not stable yet. And the Qins place the most emphasis on military contributions so if the six states join forces, they will certainly lose this war and by then even King Zhuangxiang won't be able to protect Lu Buwei.

If Lu Buwei falls, the Wu family can forget about staying in Qin. The world may be huge but there will be no place where the Wu family can live in peace.

An originally simple matter has now become something complicated and troublesome.

Jing Jun finally found an opportunity to interrupt and said, "Isn't Yan and Zhao at war? Why would the Yans be involved this time as well?"

Teng Yi replied, "For these few centuries haven't the lords been fighting and making up again all the time?" He continued seriously, "Xiao Jun you'd better try to contain

your impatience, don't go looking for your Zhao Zhi before the situation is cleared. Otherwise if you reveal your disguise, all of us can forget about leaving Handan alive."

Jing Jun looked crestfallen as he nodded his head in agreement but everyone can see how unwilling he felt.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "How's the situation like over at Zhao Mu's?"

There seems to be some remnants of fear as Wu Zhuo replied, "Luckily we caught the envoy sent by the Chus, otherwise we'll definitely be greatly disadvantaged. It turns out that Zhao Mu is the 5th son of Chu's Lord Chunshen and this Chu envoy Bai Dingnian is sent by Lord Chunshen to make contact with Zhao Mu. He even brought with him Lord Chunshen's secret letter that he wrote personally and this saves me a lot of trouble trying to question him."

Teng Yi said with a laugh, "And of course Eldest Brother won't give it to that conniving thief without changing a single word on that letter!"

Wu Zhuo replied with a smile, "That's of course. The contents of the secret letter is simple, only telling Zhao Mu to trust Bai Dingnian and cooperate with him well. As for what to cooperate about, it was not written. Therefore I copied the seal on the letter and wrote another letter to give to Zhao Mu. Now it seems that he totally trusts us."

Xiang Shaolong had an idea as he asked, "Is that secret letter still around?"

Wu Zhuo replied, "How can I lose such a useful thing, I even kept that Chu envoy and he's being imprisoned in a secret place in Handan. Zhao Mu is in trouble this time."

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed and after the four brothers had some further discussion, he recollected his thoughts and went to the Zhao Palace for the feast.

Along the way Xiang Shaolong remembered the time he went to the Zhao Palace for his duel with Lian Jin and feelings arose in him.

How everything in the world is so unpredictable, just like this.

Who would have thought at that time that on this day, two years later, he would come to see the King of Zhao in another identity and a totally different feeling?

Under the guidance of the Zhao soldiers, Xiang Shaolong and his three sworn brothers proudly rode past the Palace gates.

The imperial guards were posed to welcome them at the square in front of the main palace building and with the drums beating, it was a very lively atmosphere.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest did not expect such a huge welcome and were all surprised. Now they know that the King of Zhao places much importance on their 'return'.

One of the military officers rode out on his horse and cried out loudly complimentary and welcoming phrases and surprisingly it's their old friend, that ungrateful Cheng Xu.

That fellow's army uniform has changed and it seems like he has been promoted a rank and has become the head of the imperial guards.

Xiang Shaolong followed civilities and after making some empty polite talk, rode with him towards the Palace.

Cheng Xu said with a warm smile, "I don't know why, although it's the first time I've met you, I feel like we're old friends. Oh! Mister feels like sometime I'm very familiar with but I can't remember who that person is right now."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled and knows that although he has changed his looks, but his build remains the same and he might subconsciously reveal some loopholes through his mannerisms and actions, that's why it stirred up Cheng Xu's memories and feel of him.

He replied nonchalantly with his 'low, hoarse and slow' voice, "Officer Cheng need not think this is weird, I've often had this feeling as well, to see someone for the first time and yet feels we've already known each other for a long time."

Cheng Xu seems enlightened and replied, "Seems like that's the case!"

By now they have reached the square in front of the Jade Hall at the inner Palace and Cheng Xu dismounted first followed by Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi and the rest.

More than ten imperial guards were lined up on each side of the Jade Hall, standing in attention with their halberds. That

conniving thief Zhao Mu, with the accompaniment of Le Cheng and Guo Kai, walked down to welcome them.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest sighed in their hearts on seeing this. To think that even after they have given King Xiaocheng such a severe lesson, he still relies on Zhao Mu so much.

Zhao Mu started chuckling from afar as he said, "I am the Marquis of Julu, Zhao Mu! Mister Dong has arrived just in time, his majesty is getting anxious from the wait."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be terrified as he replied respectfully, "If I've made his Majesty anxious, how can I ever answer for it."

Zhao Mu came forward, extended his hands to grasped his and said with a smile after making an eye signal at him, "His Majesty has personally seen the warhorses that you've sent and is very satisfied. With your help, us Great Zhao will certainly be able to show off our military prowess."

Xiang Shaolong saw that Zhao Mu did not recognize him and was relieved as he answered happily, "As long as I can make his Majesty happy, then this trip is not a wasted one." At the same time he exchanged a look with Guo Kai.

Zhao Mu personally introduced him to Le Cheng while Xiang Shaolong introduced them to Teng and Jing. After a round of polite greetings, all of them went towards the Zhao Palace in a relaxed mood.

They have just stepped pass the Palace doors when the imperial guards in the hall immediately snapped neatly into attention and the band started a welcome melody.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest as well as Zhao Mu and his men knelt in front of the dais.

The King of Zhao chortled and left his dragon throne that was placed on the other end facing the main door and walked down the steps hurriedly to help Xiang Shaolong up and said warmly, "Mister Dong is my esteemed guest, there's no need to be subservient." He turned towards Teng Yi and the rest and said, "Everyone, please rise!"

Xiang Shaolong had just stood up when Jing Jun who was behind suddenly bawled and everyone, including Xiang Shaolong and his men were all stunned.

When everyone's eyes were centered on Jing Jun who has lowered his head and crying bitterly and lying on the ground, refusing to get up, that lad blubbered, "I lost myself, but to see that Young Master can now finally return to his homeland and fulfilled this wish that he has been thinking of for so many years, I'm so overcome that..." and he started crying again.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest were secretly impressed, they did not expect that Jing Jun would have the ability to cry on demand. If not for the fact that they all know in their hearts what is happening, they would really think that he is so touched that he can't help but cry.

Naturally the King of Zhao would not be suspicious at all as he walked over to help Jing Jun up and after consoling him, he turned towards Xiang Shaolong and said, "I am extremely touched that Mister Dong has such a loyal servant."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong has the time to take note of the surroundings inside the hall.

The Empress of Zhao Han Jing has also attended the feast and is seated on the right slightly behind King Xiaocheng and her eyes are boring into him. Luckily from her expression she seemed only curious and not because she has seen any loopholes.

On the bottom of both sides of the King of Zhao's table there were another four tables. It's meant to be a table for each person, which means there's an empty table left. He wondered who is the person who is putting on such airs, to even have the audacity to be late at the King of Zhao's feast?

He replied earnestly, "Although I have been overseas for a long period of time, but I have been constantly thinking of returning but because of Master Wu, I was afraid..."

The King of Zhao gave a cold snort and interrupted him, "Don't mention this person again. Don't worry! It's great that Mister keeps old relations in mind. From today onwards, just help me rear horses well and I will not treat you badly."

Xiang Shaolong and the rest hurriedly knelt and expressed their thanks and gratitude.

Just as they were about to be seated, the official at the door cried out, "Lady Ya arrives!"

Xiang Shaolong and the rest were all startled and they all turned to look towards the main door.

Other than a little more trace of weariness, Zhao Ya still looked radiant and outstanding, wearing a grand evening gown with blue flowers embroidered on a white base, like a colorful butterfly flying into the hall.

Xiang Shaolong thought of their old love and can't help but feel secretly sad.

When Zhao Ya's pretty eyes flitted over to where Xiang Shaolong was, her body obviously shivered a little and she held her step.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest were all secretly alarmed.

Zhao Ya is not like Zhao Mu or King Xiaocheng, she can feel what others cannot just based on her woman's sharp intuition towards love and intuition to a man whom she has been intimate with almost daily.

Luckily King Xiaocheng and Empress Jing both thought that this wanton woman has taken a liking to Xiang Shaolong, which accounted for her strange expression so they laughed and said, "Imperial Sister is late again, I must punish you by making you drink three cups of wine later. Aren't you coming over to meet Mister Dong!"

Zhao Ya recollected her thoughts and after giving a suspicious look at Xiang Shaolong, her pretty eyes suddenly

dimmed as she moved towards the King of Zhao and knelt in respect before standing up and turned towards Xiang Shaolong to pay her respects and said, "Zhao Ya pays her respects to Mister Dong."

Xiang Shaolong and the rest heaved a sigh of relief and took the opportunity to be seated as well.

With Xiang Shaolong as the head, they took the four tables on the right. On the other side was Zhao Mu, Zhao Ya, Le Cheng and Guo Kai.

When the serving maids brought the dishes in, a group of 30 odd dancers ran in and started dancing with the accompaniment of drums.

Zhao Ya kept her pretty head lowered ever since she sat down, her expression sad. It looks as if her feelings have been roused and she was secretly wallowing in pity.

After the dance the host and guests offered toasts to one another.

However Zhao Mu would not let Zhao Ya off and reminded everyone of her punishment and forced her to down three cups of wine.

The slightly tipsy Zhao Ya began to loosen up and kept smiling coquettishly and flirting and although Xiang Shaolong was fuming on seeing this, but she did make the feast more lively and enjoyable. Once this beauty starts flirting, not a single man will be able to control his itch on seeing her. Especially now that she has reverted to her old wanton ways

and was throwing looks at everyone there. Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo are better off but Jing Jun's head is already clouded as he kept on exchanging toasts with her.

After a while, the King of Zhao turned towards Xiang Shaolong and asked, "When does Mister intend to start your grand business here?"

Xiang Shaolong's hoarse voice said slowly, "I just made a trip here first, there's still a few war horses and stud horses who are being transported here now. There shall be no delay, I will go out the city tomorrow to explore and see if there are any suitable sites to set up a farm."

The King of Zhao said joyously, "That's the best!"

Zhao Ya threw a glance at Xiang Shaolong and said, "Is Mister's family arriving at the same time as well?"

Xiang Shaolong saw how immodest she was and was secretly displeased as he replied icily, "Once everything has been settled, I will send my men back to bring them here."

Le Cheng asked curiously, "The way that Mister Dong is moving your whole family over to our country, aren't you afraid that will incur the Chu's wrath?"

Xiang Shaolong replied calmly, "My farm is situated at the borders of Chu and Wei and as long as I send 500 warhorses and 500 livestock to the Chus every year, they will never interfere in my affairs. I have long made arrangements for my trip here this time and they won't find out anything for the time being."

The King of Zhao chortled as he said, "Let's not talk business tonight and just talk about entertainment. Come! I'll let Mister see something good."

He clapped his hands and music started again.

While everyone opened their eyes wide, four dance courtesans flitted towards the tables and started another round of song and dance.

Not only did their beauty far surpass the dancers earlier, what is even more heart stopping is that their alluring bodies are each only clad in purple, red, bright yellow and light blue translucent gauze as they held long swords and danced. Their youthful and appealing bodies were exposed once in a while through the flimsy outfit as they danced, looking absolutely beautiful. Especially when their gentle bodies were paired with the steely swords, the two extremities increased their wildness.

Xiang Shaolong, who has not touched a woman since he started his journey, can't help but feel his lust ignite on seeing this.

After the courtesans retreated, Zhao Mu said with a smile, "These are the best among the ten Yan beauties that the Yan gave to his Majesty, and they are also the welcome gifts that his Majesty is giving to Mister. Do you think they're still acceptable?"

It is the norm for the powerful in this era to seal relationships by giving away beauties but it's not appropriate for Xiang Shaolong to accept the gifts given his current

situation so he said with a straight face, "I appreciate his Majesty's kind intentions but there are a lot of things to look into right now regarding the opening of the farm and it's really not good to have female distractions. I would ask that your Majesty retract your order."

The King of Zhao was stunned for a moment before he replied, touched, "Mister is indeed an extraordinary man, no wonder you have the reputation of being a horse fanatic. Since that is the case, I will keep these four Yan ladies in the palace and will send them to your residence once everything has been settled."

Zhao Ya eyed Xiang Shaolong with great interest as she asked, "I wonder if Mister has decided when to leave the city to explore?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that she has gotten curious now that she saw how unmovable he can be over beauties and was secretly lamenting as he replied with furrowed brows, "I'll leave before dawn tomorrow, and hope that General Le Cheng can arrange for the city gates to be opened."

He guessed that now that Zhao Ya has returned to her old flirtatious and languid ways, there's no way that she will try to wake up that early, which is why he deliberately mentioned that.

As expected, Zhao Ya revealed a look of disappointment and did not say anything.

The feast continued and although it was said that they shall not talk business, but because Xiang Shaolong is pretending

to be an unrefined man who only knows husbandry, the topics always revolves around this area.

When the King of Zhao asked about the situation in Chu, Xiang Shaolong already has his answer prepared and answered them easily.

The host and guests drank to their heart's content.

After the feast Zhao Mu used the excuse of sending Xiang Shaolong home and shared the same carriage as him and took the opportunity to have a secret discussion.

This is the second danger after Zhao Ya.

The carriage went out of the Palace gates.

Zhao Mu's expression immediately turned stony as he asked icily, "Who thought of the idea to actually give 1000 fine warhorses to the Zhaos?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly fining this hilarious but replied calmly, "Of course it's Lord Chunshen's idea."

Zhao Mu's expression turned dark as his gleaming eyes stared at Xiang Shaolong coldly as he asked, "Are you really that 'horse fanatic' Dong Kuang?"

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice, "Of course not. The real horse fanatic did have the intention of returning to Zhao and has long been killed by his Highness and had his possessions confiscated. These thousand warhorses are only part of his property."

Zhao Mu commented with incomprehension, "I only asked you to send people here to get 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual' from Guo Zhong, why have you come to Handan with so much fanfare instead. If something happens, even I may become implicated."

Xiang Shaolong replied slowly, "This is Lord Chunshen's ingenious plan. Since the incident with the Wu family, the state of Zhao is badly affected. They strong on the outside but is actually crumbling inside and this may become advantageous for Qin, Wei and Qi. His Highness has seen this coming so he changed his strategy and hopes that Master can take the place of the King of Zhao. In that way, Great Chu would be able to take control of Zhao without wasting even a single soldier."

Zhao Mu's body shook as a joyous look flashed though his eyes and he asked hoarsely, "Father really has such a plan?"

Ever since he arrived in Zhao, his power has been growing day by day but he has always felt himself in a dilemma.

Lord Chunshen's original plan was for him to control the Zhao King and use the Zhaos to keep a rein on the Qins and spoil the secret plan to unify the three states. But man is not without feeling and after staying in Zhao for more than ten years, Zhao Mu can't help but feel a sense of belonging in Zhao. But this is just useless thinking on his side for he is still under the control of the Chus even from so far away. If he harbors any other thoughts, the Chus can expose his identity at any time and that would be a very bad feeling indeed.

But if he can grab the position of the King of Zhao, that would be an entirely different situation.

Man will always aim high, and this is exactly Zhao Mu's dream.

Xiang Shaolong saw his expression and knows that he has struck a chord in his heart so he added, "How would I dare to lie to Master. The warriors who came with me this time are all topnotch fighters, and there'll be a few thousand others will enter Zhao later on the pretext of sending the animals over. As long as we can get rid of influential generals like Lian Po and Li Mu, the Kingdom of Zhao will fall into your hands easily."

Zhao Mu replied happily, "So this is the case. Let me go back and think about how we should proceed with this plan."

He reached out and clasped his shoulder, coming to his ear and whispered, "If I can really become the ruler of Zhao, I'll certainly make it worthy for Mister." Both of them exchanged looks and chortled at the same time.

Of course they are laughing for entirely different reasons.

After the returned to the grand ex-hostage residence, Teng Yi told Xiang Shaolong, "That slut is very interested in 3rd Brother, you'd better be careful."

Jung Jun commented with envy, "3rd Brother can use another identity and tryst with her a few more times, wouldn't that be thoroughly exciting?"

Before Xiang Shaolong has a chance to speak, Teng Yi reprimanded Jing Jun unhappily, "Your head is always filled with lustful thoughts, but doesn't understand that lust can impede plans. That slut had a close relationship with your 3rd Brother in the past and if they have a physical relation again, she'll definitely be able to burst Xiang Shaolong's real identity just by gut feel. Just the scent alone won't be able to escape her."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed and secretly on the alert. To tell the truth he is still quite interested in Zhao Ya's body and won't think of copulating with her as a undesirable task but he did not think of the possibility that Zhao Ya will be able to 'sniff' him out.

He said with a laugh, "Luckily I'm masquerading as a horse fanatic who only loves horses and not beauties, so it's useless no matter how interested she is in me."

After they discussed their plans for the next day, everyone went back to their rooms for the night.

After he went back to his room, Xiang Shaolong removed his mask and laid on the bed, his thoughts in a turmoil and unable to get to sleep.

The main reason is because of Zhao Ya.

This slut who has betrayed him twice obviously still has feelings for him, otherwise her memories of Xiang Shaolong would not have been ignited by a horse fanatic like him and made her interested.

An inexplicable sense of hatred welled up. Maybe it arose from her wanton behavior, or maybe it's purely the thought of revenge. Even he cannot tell the difference.

His looks after he put on the mask is certainly not handsome, the skin tone tanned from exposure to the sun but matched with the shape of his body it does exude a certain charisma right from the inside, especially his eyes whose shape has been changed still looked very energetic and captivating.

He then thought about the pretty and courageous Ji Yanran and with all these thoughts in his mind, all the more he could not get any sleep so he might as well get up and meditate according to the Mohist principles.

In a short while his body and spirit merged and when he opened his eyes the sky is slowly brightening.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly changed and after wearing his mask, went to the hall to meet up with Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo to leave together.

Jing Jun did not go with them because he had another task at hand.

Le Cheng sent a general called Xie Fa who led a troop of Zhao soldiers to be their guide and he was waiting for them in the main hall. After a round of civilities, everyone rode into the main street of Handan, where a new day is just beginning.

Hoof beats were heard behind them.

Everyone turned their heads around in surprise to see a team of horsemen coming after them and shockingly, it was Zhao Ya and ten odd of her personal guards.

Xiang Shaolong exchanged looks with Teng and Wu but had no choice but to rein in their horses to wait.

No one expected Zhao Ya's 'interest' in Xiang Shaolong to be so huge.

The smiling Zhao Ya first sent off her personal guards, which includes Zhao Da and his men, before riding forward to Xiang Shaolong and said with a beam, "Mister Dong is a guest from afar, how can you not have a companion?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that she was dressed in a tight fitting light blue horse riding wear with a short skirt and long pants and long boots, openly showing off her alluring curves. He felt a rush of feelings and was at a loss for words.

Zhao Ya rolled her eyes at him and asked, "Mister Dong does not welcome me?"

Xiang Shaolong replied slowly in his hoarse voice, "Lady, you think too much. I'll only be too delighted to have Lady accompany me!"

Zhao Ya sent out a tinkling peal of laughter as she urged her horse forward and said, "Then follow me!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly and followed her on his horse.

They left the city via the east gate and galloped.

Looking at the wild forests changing from Spring to Summer, Xiang Shaolong was in a euphoric mood as he threw away all his troubles. At the same time he has made up his mind to do one huge job here and create chaos among the Zhaos and this time he will not hold himself back because of a soft heart.

CHAPTER 10

Meeting On A Narrow Road

[Translated by JEAN]

ZHAO YA rode her horse exuberantly and the rest of them had to chase after her. After passing through the large plain outside the city, Zhao Ya left the official path and rode towards the rolling hills at the northeast.

The landscape began to change as the grass changed into strange rocks and stones as they traveled along waterfalls and dangerous cliffs, with clouds and fog surrounding them, creating an extremely beautiful scene.

After passing through a mountain, they came to a valley with cliff walls reaching into the clouds on both sides and the clear sky is just a line in the horizon.

Zhao Ya slowed down in front and just as Xiang Shaolong was about to chase up with her, Teng Yi came alongside him and said quietly, "Shaolong! If you talk to Zhao Ya with that earlier expression and tone, she'll find out sooner or later."

Xiang Shaolong was extremely startled and knows that Teng Yi can see things more clearly as a bystander. He turned back to look and saw that Wu Zhuo has engaged Xie Fa into talking about the surroundings and won't be able to hear their conversation so he quickly asked for advice.

Teng Yi replied, "Dong Kuang is famed for being someone who only knows how to rear horses and is totally unrefined in other areas, so you can do as you deem fit!"

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened and became quiet.

They reached the end of the valley and the scene in front was refreshing with the trees pointing towards the sky and the rays of sunlight filtering through the layers of thick green leaves with rainbow hues, so indescribably beautiful.

Streams were crisscrossing amongst the trees and rocks, the sounds of the water crisp and clear and it feels as if they've come to a place that is not of this earth, intoxicating their senses.

Zhao Ya seems very familiar with this place and led them to a small hilltop and they could immediately see their surroundings.

Xiang Shaolong reined his horse as he came alongside Zhao Ya and looked around. He realized that where they are standing is the center of a huge plain and with unique looking cliffs in the distance. The grounds were deep green with abundant water and grass with a fragrance in the air and he can't help but chortle, "Damn his grandmother, how does Lady know of such a splendid place?"

Zhao Ya heard such coarse language from him and her delicate brows frowned but she did not answer him.

Teng Yi and the rest came to their side as well and they all expressed their agreement. Xie Fa said, "This place is called Hidden Army Valley and the only entrance is the line in here earlier. When our Great Zhao's King Wuling was at war with Rong Di in the past, he had once hidden his army in here and won the battle. Since then this place was named Hidden Army Valley. Does Mister Dong think this place suitable?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking to himself how would he know if it's suitable so he hurriedly made an eye at Wu Zhuo, the husbandry expert.

Wu Zhuo nodded his head slightly to indicate his agreement.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to look over the surroundings before he complimented with a sigh, "Ah! It's really damn fucking good!"

Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo were secretly feeling hilarious but to Xie Fa and Lady Ya the words were jarring on their ears.

Xiang Shaolong controlled his urge to laugh and said, "Once I see something good, I can't control myself but exclaim the words fucking a few times. This is such a wonderful place, isn't it even more fucking good?"

Xie Fa was overjoyed, "So does this mean that Mister is going to choose this valley as your farm?"

At this time Zhao Ya looked towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately stared hard at her perky bosoms before nodding, "Yup! I really like the looks of this place. From this day onwards, this Hidden Army Valley will be the place where I set up my first farm. Damn his grandmother! I didn't expect to find a location so smoothly."

Zhao Ya saw the way he behaved and talked was extremely uncouth and thought that this is the real him and was secretly unhappy. She said coldly, "Since Mister Dong has found the ideal farm, can we go back now?"

Xiang Shaolong deliberately looked at her sleazily and said, "I still have to inspect the water source, soil and grass here carefully. Damn, why is Lady in such a hurry to go back?"

Zhao Ya was even more annoyed to hear how rude and foul-mouthed he was and replied with irritation, "I have other appointments, how would I have time to accompany Mister longer?"

She was secretly thinking that she must have been blinded because ever since she returned to her residence last night, she kept thinking of this person and could not sleep, which is why she came looking for him as soon as day broke. But this is good too, this person may have Xiang Shaolong's build, but his looks are a thousand miles apart so in this case, she can give up.

Ever since Xiang Shaolong, she no longer wishes to be entangled by feelings.

Xiang Shaolong thought he might as well go all the way and let Zhao Ya give up all hope on him so he asked with a strange smile, "I wonder who is the person who can make Lady in such a hurry to return?"

Zhao Ya could not tolerate it any longer and said angrily, "That is my business and has nothing to do with you at all." She pulled her horse's reins and turned and galloped towards the plains.

Xie Fa was so shocked that he hurriedly sent half of his men to escort her back to the city.

Xiang Shaolong felt gleeful.

As long as he can hurt her, he'll feel a sense of happiness.

Although she still has some feelings left for him, but if she had succeeded in harming him the last time, he would be a pile of bones by now so between them there is no more relation to speak of.

After he made a pretense of surveying the place, they went back to their residences at dusk.

Zhao Mu's men are already waiting for him to invite him to the Marquis Residence for a feast.

After Xiang Shaolong bathed and changed, he went alone with them to the Marquis Residence for the feast.

Zhao Mu was overjoyed to see him come and as it's still early, he took him to the inner hall for a secret discussion. Before he started on the main point, he laughed and said, "I heard that you thoroughly infuriated Zhao Ya. Why? You're not interested in that slut at all? Now she is at a point where it's the easiest to hook up with."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing Zhao Mu and at the same time hating Zhao Ya for cheapening herself as he replied, "I was afraid she is King Xiaocheng's spy, how would I dare to dally with her?"

Zhao Mu was obviously very impressed with his sense of caution as he clapped his shoulder and said closely, "Who else would know better than me whether she's a spy? If you're interested in her, I can make arrangements for you."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting so he quickly changed the topic, "Has Marquis thought over that matter yet?"

Zhao Mu was immediately energetic and totally forgot about Zhao Ya as he said with a serious look, "Almost everyone in Handan now is my trusted aide, we just have to get rid of a

few people and I will be able to sit on the King of Zhao's throne comfortably."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "The first two to be killed should be Lian Po and Li Mu!"

Zhao Mu complimented him, "With a talent like you helping me, need I fear my great career will fail? But there are a lot of formidable fighters around these 2, I'm afraid it'll be very difficult to strike."

Xiang Shaolong replied calmly, "If it's easy, you would have struck long ago. Leave this matter to me, as long as I can obtain accurate information on them, I'll certainly succeed with one strike. I heard that they are now not in Handan so it's best if there's a way to call them back, then I will ask my men to set up a trap and get rid of them cleanly."

Zhao Mu looked at him with suspicion, "You're really that confident? The two of them have a few thousand personal guards, they're not easy to deal with."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "No one is better than me at the art of assassination, please be assured."

How could Zhao Mu possibly believe his one sided talk so he said somberly, "We need to plan this in detail. You better set up the farm first and lay your foundation. With me speaking on your behalf to King Xiaocheng, things will certainly run smoothly."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly finding this funny. He said those words to let Zhao Mu understand for himself that this thing

cannot be rushed and now that his goal is reached, of course he's not so stupid as to keep pushing it so he nodded his head and said respectfully, "I will listen wholly to your orders, this is also his Highness's instructions."

Zhao Mu saw that he was so obedient and was secretly glad and said with a smile, "King Xiaocheng now has a very good impression of you but remember that you must hurry up on the farm. Ha! This move of yours really struck the Zhao's fatal point because they are most anxious to have a savior like you now."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I have already chosen a place for the farm and will start on it immediately tomorrow."

Zhao Mu stood up and said, "Come! The others should have arrived, besides a few of the most influential people in Handan, I have also invited the envoys from the various states who came because of Lord Dongzhou's matter. Make use of this opportunity to meet them!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has now become Zhao Mu's trusted confidante, that's why he is treating him so nicely so he stood up and followed him into the main building of the Marquis residence.

The two of them strolled past the corridors side by side and all the servants and maids knelt down to pay their respects on seeing them.

When they walked past the big garden which was right in the middle of the Marquis residence, a group of about 100 dance courtesans were practicing dancing. For a moment

the mixture of fragrance, clothes, hair, and dainty voices can make one overwhelmed.

Xiang Shaolong has sharp eyes and was surprised to find that the teacher who was directing their dance is actually Zhao Zhi and he can't help but looked at her in shock.

The training did not stop because Zhao Mu is passing by. Zhao Zhi obviously saw Zhao Mu but pretended not to notice him and kept on giving out orders to make the pretty dancers dance. The colorful costumes dazzle under the illumination of the lanterns.

Zhao Mu whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ears, "Taken a liking to her? That girl is called Zhao Zhi, her father is a learned scholar in Zhao and her Teacher is an expert in swordplay, there's nothing I can do to her too."

Xiang Shaolong just shrugged his shoulders and continued walking.

After passing the garden, they reached the long corridor that will lead them directly to the main building and it seems to be suddenly quite in comparison. A maid came towards them and on seeing Zhao Mu hurriedly moved aside and knelt down.

Right at this time, Xiang Shaolong instinctively felt alert and reflexively placed his right hand on the pommel of Blood Wave.

He was feeling perplexed and can't help but take a look at that maid only to see her hand reaching into her wide sleeve, her

head lowered and her kneeling posture was very unique, giving one a strange feeling, as if she can spring up at any moment and execute several kinds of movement.

All these are just instinctive feelings. If not for the fact that Xiang Shaolong has been meditating according to the Mohist principle every night since his journey to Handan, his feelings would not have become so sharp.

Zhao Mu felt nothing amiss at all and continued walking.

Xiang Shaolong was in a dilemma. If this girl is here to assassinate Zhao Mu, then she is on the same side as him but now he has to protect Zhao Mu because not only does he have to capture him alive to bring to Qin, he has to make use of him in his plan to kill Le Cheng and to find out the plot involving the envoy sent by Lord Dongzhou. But if he causes this girl to be captured by Zhao Mu, how can he put his heart at ease.

But now is not the time to think further, for they are now only ten steps away from the maid.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly moved from the outside to stand between Zhao Mu and the maid, hoping that this will make her retreat.

Zhao Mu became alert and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

The maid suddenly lifted her head to reveal a pretty yet strong face, her pretty eyes burning with hatred and at the same time her hands extended from inside the sleeves and

as she flicked them, two beams of white flashed towards Zhao Mu like lightning.

Zhao Mu was caught unawares and thoroughly startled and before he had a chance to exclaim or dodge, Xiang Shaolong has already drawn out Blood Wave and waved it twice with lightning speed, accurately blocking the two flying daggers.

The female assassin apparently did not have a third dagger and with a sharp scream, dashed past them out of the corridor.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to give chase and suddenly a dark shadow appeared in front of his eyes and it turns out to be the whip from the female assassin's hand.

He took the opportunity to retreat towards Zhao Mu, as if protecting him but in fact he's trying to block the path of Zhao Mu who has already drawn his sword.

The female assassin knows that she has missed her chance and rolled into the bushes without stopping and disappeared into the night.

Zhao Mu nearly collided into Xiang Shaolong and hurriedly raised his hand to grab his shoulder to brake himself.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the two daggers which has fallen to the ground and the blades shone a faint blue reflection under the light and it's obvious that it has been dipped in poison.

Zhao Mu was still a little fearful as he said, "Luckily you are here this time, otherwise my life would be gone. Humph! All

those people are idiots, not even knowing that an assassin has snuck in.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling glad for now he can gain even more trust from Zhao Mu and on the other hand allow the female assassin to escape safely.

This is not the first time he saw this highly skilled female assassin.

At that time when he took Zhao Mu’s carriage and left the Marquis residence, this female assassin mistook him for Zhao Mu and threw the poisonous snake into the carriage to assassinate him.

He wonders what is the great enmity between her and that thief Zhao Mu that she has to keep trying for his life and on both occasions she failed because of him.

But then again Zhao Mu has committed so much evil that it’s inevitable that he has enemies all over the place.

The feast was held in the wide main hall of the Marquis residence and there were about 40 odd ‘double seated’ tables to seat two people each that filled the entire hall.

By now Xiang Shaolong already has some experience with the feasts given during this era. When he saw this he was shocked for never in his dreams did he imagine that tonight’s feast would be so grand and with so many attendees.

When a ruler holds a feast for his officials and guests, it will definitely be ‘single seated’ where there’s one person per

table if there are less people and if there are grand feasts with over a hundred people, it will tables will be placed on the front and back rows with 'multiple seats' for four or more people.

As for the feasts held by most senior officials or influential people, they are mostly 'double seated'.

When the both of them arrived at the hall, there was still some time before the feast starts so only Zhao Mu's trusted aide Le Cheng and the cunning Guo Kai was around. These two are very close to Zhao Mu so they came earlier to help entertain the guests.

Zhao Mu made some small talk and disappeared, naturally he has gone to reprimand his men for their failure to protect the residence and it seems that someone will surely be in trouble.

Le Cheng and Guo Kai came up to Xiang Shaolong and started chatting with him warmly. They first asked about the chosen location for the farm before Le Cheng sighed and said, "I'm really in a difficult position this time. Everyone who thinks that they are someone in Handan are all fighting to attend tonight's feast but there's a limit to the seating. Hai..."

Guo Kai added with a wry smile, "I've met with the same problem as well and I can only push the responsibility to the Marquis and tell them to ask the Marquis directly why they are not on the list of invites."

Xiang Shaolong was extremely surprised for he thinks that he does not have the charisma to attract others that much so he asked with a furrowed brow, "Why are there so many people here for the feast tonight?"

Le Cheng asked quizzically, "Didn't Marquis tell Mister? The Learned Lady whose reputation is on par with Qin's Widow Qin, Ji Yanran is in Handan as a guest. His Marquis was not sure initially that he can invite her here but it turned out that she agreed without hesitation, that's why everyone wants to come here to take a look at her glory."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and hot blood rushed in his veins and for a moment, he couldn't speak.

Thank heavens! This rare beauty is finally here.

Guo Kai looked at him in surprise as he said, "Ha! I did not expect that Mister Dong is also another 'fan of the Learned Lady'."

Xiang Shaolong's attention is now all on Ji Yanran so how can he possibly be interested in talking nonsense with them. He made up an excuse and went out to the gardens from the side door in order to calm his excited nerves.

When he thought of how he can be reunited with his ideal beauty, he felt as if he's like a fairy floating amongst the clouds.

No matter what he must sleep with her tonight.

At the same time he was secretly puzzled. Why did she agree to attend the feast knowing very well that Zhao Mu is his greatest enemy?

Hurried footsteps sounded behind him.

Xiang Shaolong turned around suddenly in surprise and came face to face with a gorgeous beauty.

The beauty was startled and hurriedly took two steps back, her pretty face paled and her joy turned into disappointment as she lowered her head and said sadly, "Sorry! I mistook you for the wrong person."

From the faint light from the lantern a distance away, this person turned out to be the elder sister of the twin sisters who once slept with him, the Yue beauty Tian Zhen.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood. She must have walked past this place, saw his back view and recognized him as Xiang Shaolong but when she saw his disguise as Dong Kuang she was greatly disappointed.

From this he can see how deep and unforgettable is his impression on her. He felt sorry for her and said gently, "Never mind! What is your name?"

Tian Zhen's delicate body trembled as she covered her mouth and exclaimed, "You're really Master Xiang, I will remember your unforgettable voice even in my dreams."

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly covered in sweat, he did not expect that his identity would be revealed because he forgot

to change his voice and he hurriedly replied in his coarse voice, "Miss, you are mistaken!"

Tian Zhen exclaimed with joy and fell into his arms, hugging him in a death grip as she said, "I will not forget you even if I died. We were so worried about you. We really have to thank the Gods that you are all right!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he cannot hide it from her so he carried her into the deep woods and kissed her thoroughly before whispering in her ears, "Now my real identity is still a big secret!"

Tian Zhen added obediently, "I understand. I will not reveal your identity even if I have to die."

Xiang Shaolong said even more seriously, "You cannot even tell your sister about this."

Tian Zhen hesitated for a moment before nodding her head dejectedly, "All right! But like me, she misses you terribly as well!"

Xiang Shaolong was a little at ease as he said quietly, "As long as you listen to me obediently, I'll definitely take both of you with me and will not go back on my words."

Tian Zhen was so touched that tears gathered in her eyes and she kissed him thoroughly, her alluring body pressing against his.

Xiang Shaolong's long suppressed lust was immediately flamed and he can only regret that this is not the appropriate time nor place. After being entangled for a

while, the blushing Tian Zhen unwillingly walked back to the inner buildings after much persuasion from him.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled wryly before going back to the main hall.

He had just taken two steps when a pair of man and woman walked into the garden from the side door he used earlier. They were in a secret discussion and surprisingly it was Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya.

He had an idea and hid himself amongst some bushes and listened quietly.

Zhao Ya's face was drawn tight as she said icily, "Don't speak further, no way am I going to accompany that kind of coarse and unrefined brute. You have so many beauties on your hand, why don't you give him some. For example your most beloved Tian sisters, won't they satisfy him even more?"

Zhao Mu reached out and wrapped his arms around her tiny waist as he said with a sinister smile, "Or have you not forgotten Xiang Shaolong?"

Zhao Ya was stunned and replied angrily, "Don't talk nonsense, who says I cannot forget him!"

Xiang Shaolong saw how intimate they were and heard Zhao Ya's heartless words. Although he knows that she has no choice but to make such a stand, he still felt furious and thoughts of hatred and revenge surged in his head.

Zhao Mu extended his other hand and hugged her tightly, saying with a grin, "Naturally it's best that you do not think

of him. This time if the six states can successfully form an alliance, even Qin will not be able to escape her fate of being split up. By that time I want Xiang Shaolong to die without a burial place. I will whip his corpse even if he's dead in order to appease the hatred in my heart."

Zhao Ya replied icily, "Speak only if you really have that ability! Ai!"

Sounds of clothes rustling, obviously Zhao Mu was taking advantage of the close contact between their bodies to caress Zhao Ya's sensitive spots.

Xiang Shaolong was livid on hearing this and secretly hated Zhao Ya for not knowing how to love herself and cheapening herself.

Her breathing quickened uncontrollably as she breathed, "Aren't you going back to entertain the guests?"

Zhao Mu grinned lasciviously, "Don't you want me to entertain you first?"

Zhao Ya's dainty fists pounded weakly on his back as she cried out, "Let me go!"

Zhao Mu replied, "Promise me that you will accompany Dong Kuang, then I will release you!"

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood, so it turns out that Zhao Mu is trying to use Zhao Ya to get into his good books. And the reason is of course he has not only saved his life, but also executed his extraordinary alertness and

swordsmanship. He now looks at him differently and treasures him even more.

Zhao Mu is judging others by his own yardstick so naturally he thinks that power, women and wealth will be able to pull him onto his side and Zhao Ya is the best present he can think of for now.

Zhao Ya asked in bewilderment, "Why are you placing so much importance on that Dong Kuang?"

Zhao Mu gave a dry cough as he replied, "It's not I who places much importance on him, but it's your Imperial Brother's order that it's important that we treat this person well, don't you understand?"

On hearing that it's the King of Zhao's idea, Zhao Ya softened a little as she said with a quiet voice, "Maybe he's not interested in women? Otherwise why would he reject the courtesans that Imperial Brother bestowed on him last night."

Zhao Mu sighed, "All real men are lecherous. I think his standards are just too high and therefore not interested in those courtesans at all! But how can we compare our Lady Ya to them!"

Zhao Ya said icily, "Go after Ji Yanran if his standards are high then, who am I to compare?"

Xiang Shaolong could sense the bitterness in her tone and knows that she is jealous of Ji Yanran and can't help but form a plan for revenge.

Zhao Mu sighed, "Ji Yanran is famous for being a stony maiden without feelings. How can she be compared to the gentle and feeling Zhao Ya? Don't say anymore. I heard that Dong Kuang came out for a breather. Help me get him to return! Why are you so nervous? It's not as if I want you to bed him tonight."

Zhao Ya remained silent.

Xiang Shaolong knows that there's no point eavesdropping any further so he slowly slipped away.

Xiang Shaolong sat in the pavilion, looking at the starry sky as he heard Zhao Ya's approaching footsteps.

He has changed his mind about Zhao Ya now and has decided to toy with her as punishment for her.

Zhao Ya came up behind him and forced herself to suppress her hatred towards him and said congenially, "Why is Mister Dong all alone here? Almost half the guests are already here!"

Xiang Shaolong replied in his hoarse voice, still looking at the sky as he said, "I've never liked crowds. Look! The sky is so enchanting, her relation to us is so close and it's all due to the stars in her arms that we can plot our paths and know the time and seasons. After a person dies, he will return to the deepest part of her. It seems that she is protecting our lofty dreams, controlling the fate of everyone on this earth."

Zhao Ya did not expect such an unrefined person to say such profound words and was momentarily stunned. She sat

down on a rock behind him and for a moment was at a loss for words.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling melancholic as he signed and added with a wry smile, shaking his head, "When I think that regardless of Mo Di or Kong Qiu, King Wu or Duke of Zhou, when they lifted their heads, they are seeing the same sky as well. How can we not feel the eternity of the sky when compared to man's miniscule and short lives. A pity that most people still cannot forget about the fight for power, fighting tooth and nail for such shallow gains day and night. That's why I've never liked fighting for power, only hoping to rear my precious horses in a carefree manner and just speak my mind! Fuck that sky, I really love her a lot, that's why I want to fuck her, the way I fuck my beloved woman."

Although he cursed three times continuously, but this time Zhao Ya felt totally different on hearing it because he has given this three curse words a very profound feeling and meaning and it has become a totally different matter now.

Zhao Ya said in a quiet voice, "I have offended Mister today, my apologies."

Xiang Shaolong shrugged his shoulders graciously as he stood up and turned around, his burning eyes staring into her pretty face as he said with a smile, "It doesn't matter how Lady regards me. So how can there be a misunderstanding? Like this night sky. If you take only one look, maybe you'll not notice anything. But if you look closely, we will see more and more stars. The darker the

night and every star will have her own story. Without a beginning, there will not be an end.”

Zhao Ya has no defense against his stare so she lowered her head and said, “Mister’s words are indeed touching!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing for no one other than him knows how to touch this slut’s heart.

He stretched lazily and said, “All right! I should be returning to that mundane world. I only hope that time passes fast enough so that I can go home and sleep. Isn’t the world in our dreams even more beautiful?”

Zhao Ya had a longing expression, hoping that he will continue talking.

Suddenly, she felt that even if she has to sleep with him, it doesn’t seem like a terrible task after all.

Besides, his masculine body made her think uncontrollably about Xiang Shaolong.

Would it be as intoxicating to bed him as it was with Xiang Shaolong?

She really wants to know the answer!

CHAPTER 11

Unstoppable Old Flame

[Translated by JEAN]

BY THE TIME Xiang Shaolong returned to the hall together with Zhao Ya, the place is already a flurry of activity. Just scanning across the room, there were at least 50 odd people and most of them he knew from before, including Guo Zhong and his men, who were all split into ten over groups either chatting or greeting one another.

Guo Kai saw them and first gave Xiang Shaolong a look full of hidden meaning before bringing him to where Zhao Mu was

chatting with Guo Zhong and introduced him to this great merchant.

Zhao Ya is like honey surrounded by bees, with a group of men around her trying to pander to her, obviously she still has her charms.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Zhao Ya is really adaptable to be able to rebound so quickly from the blow he gave her. Hai! He'd better let her off. After all they did have a sincere relationship in the past.

Guo Zhong said warmly, "Mister Dong has come from afar. I must play host a little no matter what. I wonder if you're available tomorrow, and of course the Marquis and Scholar Guo will accompany as well."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "Master Guo is so polite. I'll have to make time even if I don't have any!"

Guo Zhong was ecstatic and made an appointment with him.

Zhao Ya managed to extricate herself and came to Xiang Shaolong's side but before she has a chance to speak, someone laughed loudly as he walked over, "I've finally seen Lady today!"

Xiang Shaolong turned his head to see a handsome and majestic looking man about 30 years of age striding over.

This person has a strong walk with a long sword hanging from his waist and an extremely imposing air.

Once Zhao Ya saw him, her pretty eyes brightened and she ignored Xiang Shaolong as she said with a flirtatious smile, "It really makes me feel bad to hear Marquis Pingshan say this, it seems as if I am very difficult to meet."

So it turns out that this person is the envoy that the State of Han sent this time, the Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang, and it seems that he is quite a character.

Zhao Mu chortled, "Please stop your flirtations for a moment. Come Marquis Chuang, let me introduce to you the world famous horse fanatic Mister Dong Kuang."

Han Chuang's gaze settled on Xiang Shaolong's face. His expression aloof and after making do with some small talk, he pulled Zhao Ya aside and started whispering affectionately with her.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling livid and hating himself for unable to forget this slut after all. Luckily the mask helped to conceal his real expression but he suddenly has less to talk about now.

Zhao Mu saw this and found an opportunity to pull him aside and said, "Just leave Zhao Ya to me, I'll make sure you'll have a chance to enjoy her. But I have a sincere warning for you. That woman is promiscuous so just have fun with her, don't ever get serious."

Xiang Shaolong knows that the misunderstanding is getting deeper so he hurriedly said, "Business is more important. I can live with or without such matters."

How can Zhao Mu possibly believe him but before he has a chance to speak further, the official at the door reported, “Lord Longyang from the State of Wei arrives!”

The hall was immediately quiet, obviously everyone was waiting to see this person and most have not seen this pretty man who is famous for his good looks.

There was a strange gleam in Zhao Mu’s eyes as he stared at the entrance.

The sounds of trinkets were heard as Lord Longyang strolled into the hall floatingly, dressed in colorful robes and accompanied by four to five swordsmen.

The hall immediately came abuzz with whisperings; the topic of conversation is naturally around this transgender male.

Zhao Mu tapped Xiang Shaolong’s shoulder and went forward.

Guo Kai came to Xiang Shaolong’s side and said with a low laugh, “Isn’t it extremely amazing that there is such a character in the world?”

Le Cheng also came to his other side and shook his head as he sighed, “His Marquis will be kept quite busy.”

Xiang Shaolong saw Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang chatting and laughing quietly and was secretly thinking it was eye opening and at the same time was on the alert. This Lord Longyang is especially interested and scrutinizing towards men and if he’s not careful, ‘he’ may find some loopholes and that would be terrible.

Zhao Ya's voice rang up from behind him, "What's the matter? Look at the way all of you are staring, were you unable to resist the lure of the men?"

Xiang Shaolong could not repress the repulsion he felt towards the way she was behaving intimately with the Marquis of Pingshan earlier so he just gave a cold snort and left.

Zhao Ya ran after him and said with a coquettish smile, "Why does Mister Dong look unhappy? Have I offended you?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. Only now was he able to confirm that he still had some feelings left for this wanton woman. That's why he can't help but feel jealous and lost control of himself. He hurriedly recollected himself as he stopped walking to look at her, saying with a smile, "Lady you think too much. You have not done anything to make me unhappy so why would you say that?"

At the same time he thought that Zhao Ya could have deliberately made use of Han Chuang to test his intentions towards her.

Zhao Ya glared at him and asked, "Then why is it that Mister Dong is avoiding me when I've only said one sentence?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that there's no way he can explain himself so he might as well not explain so he just replied nonchalantly, "I like to do whatever I like, and have never wasted my effort to think of the reason."

Under his stare, a sense of familiarity and confusion rose in Zhao Ya's heart and his natural manliness and intensity softened her heart as she sighed sadly and said, "You're really unfathomable. One moment you're gentler than anyone else and the next you're cold and heartless, like now. It makes one wonder how to deal with you."

Right then Xiang Shaolong saw Zhao Zhi accompanying Zhao Ba into the hall, joining Zhao Mu's group. Zhao Mu waved him over to meet Lord Longyang. He smiled at Zhao Ya as he said, "There's enough people here to take Lady's attention, there's no need to waste your precious time on an unrefined person like me. Look! Marquis Pingshan is looking for you again."

Zhao Ya glanced towards where he was looking. Han Chuang had just ended his polite talk with Lord Longyang and is walking towards her and she was secretly irritated with Han Chuang for coming at the wrong time.

After she lost Xiang Shaolong, she has felt extreme sadness and emptiness. That's why she returned to her old lascivious lifestyle, hoping to use other men to numb and cheapen herself so that it will reduce her guilt and the pain of missing Xiang Shaolong.

But no one could replace Xiang Shaolong.

When this Han Chuang first arrived in Zhao, she was embroiled in a heated relationship with him and spent a short and happy time together. But she can't help but feel

that this person cannot replace Xiang Shaolong so she slowly cooled off, needing another new and fresh excitement.

That's why when she met Dong Kuang whose physique 'closely resembles' Xiang Shaolong, it seems that she has found a new life. Although she was irritated by his unrefined behavior and words this morning, she cannot deny that it gives her another feeling of excitement too. When Xiang Shaolong spoke such intoxicating words to her at the garden earlier, making her remember the heady time she once spent with Xiang Shaolong, her attention has already moved to this person.

The more Xiang Shaolong shows his manliness and imposing aura, the more she feels that this man is the personification of Xiang Shaolong and the more she is falling for him. Under such circumstances, Han Chuang has instead turned into an irritating obstacle.

As she was thinking, Han Chuang has already reached her.

Xiang Shaolong smiled suavely and bid his leave, walking towards Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang's group.

Zhao Zhi and Lord Longyang looked towards Xiang Shaolong at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately changed his style of walking, making it a swagger as he raised his hands in greeting and said in a coarse voice, "Dong Kuang pays his greetings to Lord Longyang!"

A look of surprise flashed past Lord Longyang's 'pretty eyes' as he replied, "I've long heard of Mister's great name, it's really fortunate that we get to meet today!"

Zhao Zhi's pretty eyes were wide open, staring intently at him.

Zhao Mu chortled as he introduced Zhao Ba and a few senior officials of Zhao to Xiang Shaolong.

Lord Longyang 'smiled coquettishly', "Mister is indeed a great man of our times, no wonder you're making us girls all stare at you!"

Zhao Zhi's pretty face blushed before she realized that she has behaved irregularly because this person closely resembles Xiang Shaolong. She lowered her pretty face and stared angrily at Lord Longyang.

Xiang Shaolong felt his goose pimples rising under the eyes of Lord Longyang and prayed that he has not taken a liking to him.

Zhao Ba chortled as he said, "Lord Longyang and Mister Dong are both expert swordsmen, why don't we find a day to exchange pointers at my school. Wouldn't that be a grand event in the martial arts realm?"

Lord Longyang's glittery eyes surveyed the hall before he said with a smile, "If we can manage to invite our Learned Lady Ji to the school as well, maybe everyone here will go there to partake in the atmosphere. Now that would really be a grand event!"

Everyone laughed together with him.

Zhao Zhi can't help but to steal another look at Xiang Shaolong, her expression strange.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, he guessed that Jing Jun could have leaked some news, otherwise Zhao Zhi's expression wouldn't have looked so strange.

Right at this time, the door official deliberately raised his voice as he sang out, "Miss Ji Yanran arrives!"

The noisy atmosphere in the hall immediately ceased and everyone, men and women, all looked towards the main door.

Xiang Shaolong's heart began beating faster.

Will this pretty lady whom he has not seen for so long still look as wonderful?

VOLUME 7

CHAPTER 1

So Near And Yet So Far

[Translated by JEAN]

AS everyone in the hall waited expectantly, Ji Yanran flitted in and accompanying her is the current expert of astronomy, his old friend Zou Yan.

Ji Yanran has lost some weight but it has not affected her beauty at all. Besides, her freshness and purity is something that no one can win against.

Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi are all outstanding beauties but when compared to her, they immediately paled in comparison.

There's a little more sadness in Ji Yanran's pretty eyes, and who knows if it may be because she misses him.

Zou Yan on the other hand looks energetic as he accompanied Ji Yanran into the main hall.

Xiang Shaolong was afraid that Ji Yanran would recognize his build so he hurriedly hid behind Zhao Ba and Zhao Zhi.

Zhao Mu who was dumbfounded on seeing her finally regained his senses and stepped forward, saying loudly, "Welcome, Learned Lady Ji and Mister Zou, for coming."

Everyone can't help but lean nearer towards the entrance, to take a look at this beauty famed for her looks and intellect.

Xiang Shaolong was instead pushed out of the way.

Zhao Zhi's voice rang next to his ear, "Mister Dong!"

At this time Zhao Mu was introducing Ji Yanran and Zou Yan to the guests one by one and Xiang Shaolong was startled as he turned around to look at Zhao Zhi who was behind him. He saw that her pretty eyes were gleaming as she stared deeply at him so he hurriedly smiled and asked, "Miss Zhao has something to say?"

Zhao Zhi replied gently, "Mister looks really like someone I know!"

Xiang Shaolong was relieved and knows that Jing Jun has only leaked a little news, he did not reveal everything at all so he pretended to look interested and asked, "Would that be Miss Zhao's lover?"

His words are obviously teasing as he knows that Zhao Zhi will definitely not be able to take it and he'll thank his lucky stars if she will henceforth ignore him. However, Zhao Zhi's pretty face blushed instead as she lowered her head with shyness. She suddenly shook her head and walked away.

Ji Yanran's laughter could be heard tinkling from the crowd over there. However Xiang Shaolong is breaking out in cold sweat. What is this all about? Isn't Zhao Zhi in love with Jing Jun? Then why does she look as if she has feelings for him, and wouldn't that make him Jing Jun's rival in love? If she doesn't like Jing Jun, why is she returning his letters?

Just as he was feeling numb, it was now Zhao Ya's turn to look for him.

Zhao Ya had an obviously jealous expression yet she pretended to be nonchalant and said, "Everyone is in a hurry to get to know Ji Yanran but why is Mister hiding here?"

Xiang Shaolong's hatred towards her was still strong so he deliberately made fun of her, going near her ear and whispering in a coarse voice, "I am naturally astoundingly attractive to women. If I let Ji Yanran get close to me, she

will definitely not be able to retrain her feelings so it's better that I stay away."

Zhao Ya was stunned on hearing it. To think that there is such a thick-skinned man in the world who will boast of his charm towards women. Especially when the recipient of his speech is a woman like her. Isn't he insinuating that she is also offering herself because she could not resist his lure?

She almost wanted to leave in anger but her pretty legs won't listen to her, insisting on staying put. Even though he insulted her, she seems to feel a masochistic joy in it.

Looking at how uncertain and sad her pretty face looked, Xiang Shaolong felt a sense of accomplishment and added on, "I'm even more afraid of bedding women, because once those women had a taste of my prowess and the joy, I guarantee that they will not be able to leave me. Hai! That would really be a headache."

Zhao Ya was absolutely flabbergasted. There's not a single person whom she has just met would dare to say such shameless and dirty words to her. But of all things this person has said something, which she felt, is so moving to the core ever since she met Xiang Shaolong.

She was absolutely confused and unconsciously said, "But all men wants to get Learned Lady Ji's heart and body, why is Mister the only exception?"

Xiang Shaolong found it very interesting to make fun of her and replied with a smile, "People say, talent can arouse jealousy, I think that this sounds very reasonable. If I manage

to get Learned Lady Ji and she in turn refuses to let go of me, we'll certainly incur the jealousy of others. Won't it bring unnecessary trouble that will be disadvantageous to my grand plan of setting up the family business here. That's why I can only suppress my lust. Hai! To tell you the truth, back in Chu, I must have a woman with me every night!"

Zhao Ya blushed on hearing that but at the same time felt a ridiculous sense of wild excitement. She lowered her head and said, "Has Mister always been so direct in your talks with women whom you've just met?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly finding this funny as he replied, "I've always spoken from my heart towards women. You can excuse yourself if you don't like to listen, I've always been like that."

Zhao Ya's sense of self-respect could not tolerate this any further and she replied angrily, "Mister does not respect how a girl feels at all. Who would be able to tolerate such talk?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that the attention of everyone else were all centered on Ji Yanran and no one took notice of them at all so he chortled, "Women are like horses, once you know of their likings, you can tame them into obedient creatures. Hei! Horses that I have taken a liking to, every single one of them will ultimately surrender to my whip."

These words are even more obvious. Zhao Ya could not take it any longer and replied angrily, "Mister is too overbearing

towards women. Treating humans as beasts and taming them, don't you care about other's feelings at all?"

But in her heart she was confused, unable to determine what kind of a person is this horse fanatic. At one moment he seems to be a gentleman who does not chase after women, the next moment he's suddenly like a sex maniac.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he's made her suffered enough and said nonchalantly, "To me, horses have better morality than humans. Once they have regarded someone as master, they will not keep changing their minds."

Zhao Ya was stunned, for these words seemed to have stirred the pain in her heart.

Xiang Shaolong realized that Zhao Zhi was peeping at him talking to Zhao Ya from amongst the crowd so he winked at her mischievously, making her so furious that she hurriedly turned her head away.

Zhao Ya noticed it and she asked with furrowed brows, "What has Mister spoken to Zhao Zhi about?"

Xiang Shaolong was thinking that it was none of her business, since he did not even ask her what did she and Marquis Pingshan spoke about. He went near her ears and said, "She is a wild horse, and Lady is another horse."

This time Zhao Ya has finally reached the end of her patience and she suddenly looked livid and was about to reprimand him when Zhao Mu's voice could be heard saying, "Mister

Dong Kuang has gone over that side. Miss Ji would like to get to know tonight's star!"

Everyone turned around to look towards the two of them.

Xiang Shaolong cast a meaningful eye at Zhao Ya before leaving with a smile, secretly feeling smug that he has finally vented his anger. It's best that from now on Zhao Ya will lose her interest in him, which would save him a lot of unnecessary trouble.

Hai!

If she could just cultivate herself by staying at home and repent, maybe he'll be softhearted and forgive her, but now it's a totally different matter. He finally managed to squeeze past the crowd to reach Zhao Mu's side.

Ji Yanran's pretty eyes landed on him and a strange gleam suddenly darted past but when she noticed that it's not Xiang Shaolong, her eyes dimmed again. The changes in her expression were obvious.

Xiang Shaolong forced the feelings of excitement and heat down as he paid his respects, "Dong Kuang pays his respect to Miss Ji and Mister Zou."

Ji Yanran regained her senses and returned his bow with a smile, "I've long heard of Mister's name. Yanran is also a horse lover, I must seek Mister's advice if the opportunity arises."

Xiang Shaolong feels the regrettable feeling of her being so near and yet so far! He secretly thought that if he doesn't

make use of this rare opportunity to secretly make her understand, he'll need to spend a lot more trouble in future. If she could not find him, or received news that he has gone to Qin and thus make her way there, they would have missed the chance to meet.

He immediately nodded his head and replied, "How can I live up to Miss's praise. I've heard of Miss Ji's excellent horse named Jifeng, and wonder if you can let me see it and it would be an eye opener for me."

Ji Yanran and Zou Yan were equally startled.

Ji Yanran was immediately energized as her pretty eyes stared at him unwaveringly as she said, "If Mister is free, why don't you come over to my place tomorrow morning and I can learn from your expertise."

Everyone around them threw looks of envy at Xiang Shaolong. They did not expect that this person would be able to have the chance to interact with this rare beauty in close proximity because of his skills in rearing horses.

Lord Longyang's dainty voice interrupted, "A few of my horses seemed to have fallen ill, can Mister Dong come and take a look as well."

This sentence caused him to receive another kind of envious looks.

Xiang Shaolong was thinking this is a headache and secretly lamenting but he replied with perfunctory, "Your highness

have traveled a long way here, the horses are just tired! They'll be fine after resting for a while."

Once he said that, every is clear that Xiang Shaolong has no interest in men at all.

Lord Longyang whined, "My horses and I have rested for more than a month, besides they only fell ill recently. Aren't you a horse lover? How can you just watch them die?"

Zhao Mu was afraid that he'll offend Lord Longyang so he moved the conversation along by saying, "Mister Dong is not like that at all. I'll find some time tomorrow to accompany Mister Dong to pay a visit to Lord Longyang."

He then said to Ji Yanran, "I would like to see this marvelous steed that can make Mister Dong pine over it as well."

Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran secretly cursed but there's nothing they can do to him.

The latter said with resign, "Yanran will of course welcome you, your Highness. Please come with Mister Dong!"

Zhao Ya's feelings are entirely different.

Never in her dreams would she expect Ji Yanran to proactively invite this nonsensical weirdo. Could it be that he really has the natural attraction towards women? Indeed she herself has been caught in a flutter, not knowing whether she should like him or hate him.

Zhao Mu said, "The feast should begin, Miss Ji please be seated."

Ji Yanran can't help but cast a meaningful look towards Zou Yan.

How can that wily old fox Zou Yan not understand so he said with a smile, "Since Yanran and Mister Dong are both horse lovers and this is such a rare chance today, why don't I exchange seats with Mister Dong."

This time even Zhao Mu's jealousy was aroused but everyone knows that Ji Yanran have always taken interest in weird and rare people which has nothing to do with romantic feelings at all so no one would think that these two would have any secret relationship at all.

Xiang Shaolong suppressed the excitement he felt and replied happily, "This is more than what I can ask for. I'm just afraid that I am too ill-learned and Miss Ji would be offended."

Ji Yanran gave a sweet smile which stunned everyone before saying gently, "It is I who should feel favored."

She dare not look at Xiang Shaolong any longer and turned to follow Zhao Mu's attendant towards a table on the left. The aqua and white colored gown together with the jet black and shiny hairstyle attracted the gaze of everyone.

Zhao Ya wished that she could give Xiang Shaolong a few stabs. He just said that he will not go near Ji Yanran and yet now he's showing off that he could be next to her. Suddenly, she was startled to realize that she has successfully forgotten about Xiang Shaolong. In her heart now there is only this hateful, yet lovable, unfathomable wild man.

After Xiang Shaolong was seated, he realized that it's still difficult to talk. Firstly the two of them were about five feet apart but also because pretty maids were behind both of them trying to serve them so no matter how much they have to say to each other, there is no chance to.

Sitting opposite them were Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya. The latter deliberately trying not to look at Xiang Shaolong and the atmosphere was embarrassing.

Zhao Mu thought that Zhao Ya was unhappy that he forced her to be close to Xiang Shaolong, that's why she was furious and did not think much of it.

The few hundred tables were fully seated and the atmosphere was lively.

Zou Yan was seated together with Guo Kai and they were laughing and talking.

After Ji Yanran was seated, she felt that she has no opportunity to speak with Xiang Shaolong at all because she is the star of the feast and everyone is trying to show themselves off in front of her and she had to entertain all of them.

Two pairs of eyes constantly flitted to where Xiang Shaolong was. One pair belonged to Lord Longyang who was seated on the table next to the main table. And the other belonged to Zhao Zhi, who was seated together with Zhao Ba at the table five tables down, opposite from Zhao Mu.

The Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang, who held no regard for Xiang Shaolong initially, was now staring at him with hatred when he saw that he actually had the honor of sitting together with Ji Yanran.

At this time someone asked Ji Yanran, "I wonder what is the thing that can move Miss Ji's heart in this world?"

Everyone felt this to be very interesting so they all looked steadily at Ji Yanran, waiting to see how she'll respond.

Ji Yanran's pretty eyes turned around as she replied with a smile, "This is a very difficult question to answer! There will be different answers at the different stages of life. Maybe when Yanran's beauty is gone, the thing that I would want most is my youth, which will never come back!"

Everyone knows she's deliberately avoiding the question and they all expressed their displeasure, forcing her to give an answer.

How can Xiang Shaolong bear to let his love be bullied so he chortled and said, "Miss Ji has already answered this question. Something that is unobtainable will always be pined for."

Everyone became quiet and as they mulled over it, felt that the reply was reasonable.

For example, everyone would like to become the ruler of a country, and precisely because they know that there's no way they can get it, it becomes more of a lure for them.

Guo Zhong said with admiration, "I did not expect that Mister Dong would have other skills besides the art of rearing horses."

Everyone laughed.

Lord Longyang said coquettishly, "I wonder what thing will attract Mister Dong?"

The Marquis of Pingshan interrupted, "Of course it's a treasured horse that can travel a thousand miles in a day!"

Immediately laughter roared in the hall and the atmosphere was lively.

Xiang Shaolong knows that now is a good opportunity for him to portray himself in an unrefined yet open image in front of these administrators of Zhao so he said loudly, "Not at all! Not at all! Just having one or two rare horses is of no help at all to the overall situation, what I want is 10,000 warhorses that can give my King victory."

All the Zhaos seated nodded their head in agreement.

Zhao Ya can't help but ask, "But what is the impossible thing that can make Mister Dong pine for it?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed roughly and continued talking in his trademark hoarse voice, staring at Zhao Ya as he replied, "I've always lacked imagination, and I will never waste my effort thinking about things that I know for sure that I cannot get. But! Hei! Some things that can be obtained and yet still out of reach can make my heart itch so much that I have sleepless nights."

All the men there understood the underlying meaning and smiled.

Zhao Ya saw that he was staring at her as he spoke and felt both anger and joy. She lowered her head and avoided his gaze.

Ji Yanran who was next to him thought about the thing that she could almost have as well and her pretty face blushed unconsciously. She secretly took a look at him, wishing that she can throw herself immediately into his arms.

At this time an attendant suddenly walked in towards Zhao Mu and quietly reported something to him. Zhao Mu revealed a look of surprise and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong was just feeling puzzled when Zhao Mu stood up and announced, "Tonight we have another esteemed just who has just arrived and he is the most popular guest of Chu's Lord Chunshen, Mister Li Yuan."

Once Xiang Shaolong heard that, he was startled and cold sweat broke out.

CHAPTER 2

Guest From Afar

[Translated by JEAN]

UNDER everyone's gaze, Li Yuan, who was dressed in grand robes and looks about 25 or 26 years old, stepped into the hall suavely under the accompaniment of Zhao Mu's attendant.

Undeniably he is a very good looking man, fresh but with character. He has broad shoulders, slender waist, long legs, standing straight and tall with a long sword hanging from his waist, giving one the impression that he's well versed in both scholarly pursuits and martial arts.

His eyes were alert and lively; obviously this is an intelligent person and not someone to be belittled.

Xiang Shaolong's heart started pounding.

He has so many things to worry about that he's not even sure himself.

The worst thing is that he may be able to tell from just one look that he is not the horse fanatic Dong Kuang. By then he can forget about leaving the Marquis residence alive.

Secondly is his relationship with Zhao Mu. If Li Yuan is the person sent by Chu's Lord Chunshen to secretly liaise with Zhao Mu, then Zhao Mu will immediately realize the trap that Xiang Shaolong has set for him.

Besides, if Li Yuan knows that the Chu envoy still has not reached Handan, he'll definitely guess that something happened along the way and this will arouse his and Zhao Mu's suspicion.

Any one of these problems is enough to make their whole group perish.

Hai! How did someone like this end up appearing out of nowhere?

Li Yuan stepped into the hall, listening as Zhao Mu spoke to him and at the same time suavely acknowledging the guests seated on both sides with a slight smile.

Xiang Shaolong wished that Li Yuan would never finish his walk.

Ji Yanran is was alert and had long noticed that his expression seemed strange so she said with a smile, "Mister Dong! The State of Chu is really filled with talents. Not only has it produced a horse expert like you, there's also the extraordinary Mister Li Yuan who is famed for his intellect and swordsmanship. His younger sister Li Yanyan is the latest beloved concubine of the King of Chu and I heard that she's now pregnant. If she can bear a son, he will become the Crown Prince of Chu, so now everyone thinks that his future is limitless."

Xiang Shaolong understood that it's because of the maids behind hindering them, she deliberately used such a method to drop hints on Li Yuan's background. She went to Chu before arriving in Handan, so naturally she knows about the latest news from Chu.

But he felt that when she mentioned Li Yuan's name, her expression looked a little unnatural.

When Li Yuan saw Ji Yanran, his eyes immediately brightened and he came to their table and politely greeting Xiang Shaolong, "How do you do, Mister Dong! We may both be from Chu, but I did not expect that we only have the chance to meet here in Handan, which is a thousand miles away."

Xiang Shaolong was slightly relieved that the most urgent problem is solved so he rose and returned the greeting.

Zhao Mu suddenly made a strange look at him, then looked at Li Yuan with a flash of murderous intent in his eyes.

Li Yuan was not too concerned about Xiang Shaolong as his gaze turned towards Ji Yanran, immediately filled with a captivating light as he said, "Miss Ji left without a word, giving me much grief."

He lowered his voice so that other than Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong, other guests thought he was making polite talk.

Another load was off Xiang Shaolong's mind as he realized that this Li Yuan is actually harassing Ji Yanran and it seems that they were once together in Chu. Otherwise Li Yuan would not have spoken with such jealousy. It seems that this Li Yuan is a born romantic, otherwise why would he run after her through mountains and lakes all the way from Chu. Once he thought of this, he feels troubled again. Ever since Zhao Ya betrayed him, he no longer has the blind faith he used to have towards women. This Li Yuan is an outstanding person and so passionate about love, how would he know if he would be able to snatch Ji Yanran away from his hands. If this really turns out to be the case, the blow to him will be even harder than the one Zhao Ya gave him.

After Ji Yanran stole a peek at Xiang Shaolong, she replied with a smile, "Mister Li, you're too harsh with your words. How can Yanran bear it?"

Zhao Mu said with a smile, "So you two are old acquaintances. Now that everyone is in Handan, why worry that there'll be no time to catch up. Why don't Mister Li join my table and enjoy the performances by the song and dance courtesans."

Li Yuan smiled suavely and after giving Ji Yanran a meaningful look, followed Zhao Mu and seated himself between Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya.

Ji Yanran seems to have been moved that Li Yuan ran after her all the way to Handan. She lowered her pretty face, her eyes looking lost.

Xiang Shaolong started feeling even more uncomfortable.

The music started, a group of over a hundred song and dance courtesans came to the middle of the hall and started singing and dancing with their colorful outfit flitting in the air, giving both auditory and sensory entertainment.

“Hey!”

Xiang Shaolong was slightly startled, only to see Ji Yanran looking at him deeply with the corner of her eyes, filled with her love and longing.

At this time the dancers have blocked the view from the direction of Li Yuan, Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya and everyone else were concentrating on enjoying the performance. The music also helped to cover their conversation so that others can't hear them. It is indeed a good opportunity to talk secrets.

Xiang Shaolong revealed a slightly unnatural smile.

Ji Yanran rolled her eyes at him and said, “Can you not show me such a lack of confidence? You don't know how much I've been missing you!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that this is called 'once bitten, twice shy'. He asked quietly, "Where are you staying?"

Ji Yanran quickly told him and added, "Don't look for me, let me look for you. Lord Longyang has always suspected that there's something going on between us so there's still people watching me even here."

Xiang Shaolong knows that she is smart beyond others and has excellent ways of accomplishing things so he's not worried that she will slip up. He nodded his head in agreement.

Ji Yanran suddenly stopped talking and recollected herself.

Xiang Shaolong was alert and immediately pretended to be totally engrossed with the performance.

It turned out that the dancers have now gathered to the middle of the hall into a small circle inside a larger circle, curving and flexing their bodies into various attractive poses, so the line of sight between Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Mu is now unblocked.

Zhao Ya is obviously quite interested in Li Yuan, constantly trying to make him talk. Xiang Shaolong was secretly livid on seeing it but even he does not know why he still has such feelings of jealousy towards her.

Li Yuan conversed with her politely but most of the time he was looking at Ji Yanran.

The Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang is obviously interested in Ji Yanran as well, looking at her intensely from time to time, as if he wants to eat her up.

All of those who had thought of wooing this world famous Learned Lady felt inept once they saw the appearance of Li Yuan and gave up the idea of wooing her. Besides, Ji Yanran seems a little interested in him as well. If not for Li Yuan's unique status and his extremely excellent swordsmanship, maybe someone would have wanted to kill him long ago.

Right until the end of the feast, the two of them could not find another opportunity to speak.

Ji Yanran left first with Zou Yan and was resolute in her rejection of Li Yuan's offer to accompany her. Of course she's making use of this to illustrate her stand towards Xiang Shaolong, which makes Xiang Shaolong and others who are interested in her extremely happy.

After Li Yuan left dejectedly, Xiang Shaolong was thinking of slipping off but was dragged by Zhao Mu to accompany him on sending off the guests at the main door.

Before Guo Zhong left, he reminded him about the feast at his house the next night.

When it came to Zhao Ba and Zhao Zhi's turn, the latter took a deep look at him before leaving with Zhao Ba whereas Lord Longyang's flirtatious look as he left gave him goose pimples.

In the end only Zhao Mu, Zhao Ya, Guo Kai, Le Cheng, Han Chuang and Xiang Shaolong were left.

It seems that Han Chuang is waiting for Zhao Ya and Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel furious, deliberately choosing to ignore Zhao Ya whose pretty eyes kept flitting over to him.

Han Chuang told Zhao Mu excitedly, "Besides the State of Yan, everyone else is here."

Although what he said seems to be without any head or tail, Xiang Shaolong knows clearly what he meant and also knows that he has mistaken Li Yuan to be the representative from Chu who has come to discuss how to attack Qin in the meeting held by Lord Dongzhou.

The situation is actually very interesting.

Amongst the six states, the ones who places the most importance in joining forces are naturally the states of Han, Zhao and Wei who are at the forefront of strong Qin.

Qi is also very anxious over the plan to join forces against Qin, because if the three states fall, the next target would undeniably be Qi, before the Chus.

Now that Han Chuang thinks that even Chu has sent an envoy over, of course he'll be ecstatic over it.

As for Yan, it is still recovering from the attacks launched by Lian Po of Zhao. Their position has fallen greatly in the eyes of the other states so it doesn't matter if they come or not.

Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, "I'm afraid Li Yuan's trip here has got nothing to do with the secret meeting."

Han Chuang laughed, "He is now the most popular person with the King of Chu and I heard that his sister's beauty can take down a country. The King of Chu has no son yet so if she manage to give birth to a Crown Prince, Li Yuan will become the uncle of the future King. Therefore if he can help put in a few good words, do we need to worry that the King of Chu won't take part in the grand scheme this time."

An icy cold look flashed past Zhao Mu's eyes again, even the scar on his face looks a lot deeper.

Xiang Shaolong could see everything clearly as a bystander and knows that Zhao Mu is filled with unhappiness and hatred towards Li Yuan.

Guo Kai said with a smile, "Is Lady tired? Let Marquis Pingshan send you back!"

Han Chuang said to Zhao Ya politely, "I wonder if I can have the honor?"

Guo Kai and Le Cheng both understood his meaning and smiled. Han Chuang's question is akin to asking Zhao Ya if he could have the pleasure of her company again tonight.

Zhao Ya seemed a little embarrassed and looked towards Xiang Shaolong.

Whereas Xiang Shaolong looked towards the square outside the door, where four horse carriages and numerous Zhao soldiers were respectfully waiting.

Zhao Mu remembered that he had promised Xiang Shaolong to help him with Zhao Ya and even if tonight is not the night.

But if he allows Han Chuang to 'take away' Zhao Ya in front of him today, it'll be a loss of face as well. So he said, "Marquis Pingshan please return early to rest, I have to enter the Palace with Lady later to meet his Majesty."

Han Chuang has no choice but to leave.

Zhao Mu told Guo Kai and Le Cheng, "I still have some things to discuss with Mister Dong, both of you can leave first!"

Guo Kai made an eye at Xiang Shaolong behind Zhao Mu's back, asking him to be careful before leaving with Le Cheng, laughing and chatting as they walked.

Only Zhao Mu, Zhao Ya and Xiang Shaolong was left and the atmosphere was a little awkward.

Zhao Mu told Zhao Ya, "After I finish a few words with Mister Dong, he'll accompany you back to your residence!"

Zhao Ya's pretty face changed as she pouted, "Don't I know how to go back on my own?"

After she stared angrily at Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong, she stepped out of the door into her carriage and left, leaving behind Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong looking at each other, both suffering a great loss of face.

Zhao Mu smiled wryly, "Some women are like a wild horse that can never be tamed, very difficult to ride on."

Xiang Shaolong agreed, "Only such women are challenging enough."

Zhao Mu pulled him away and they walked along the corridor that's leading towards the inner residence. Although it's now deep into the night and very quiet, the Marquis residence is still brightly lit, looks as if it's still day.

They only sat down when they reached the inner hall where Zhao Mu had shared with him the Yue beauties, the sisters Tian Zhen and Tian Feng, in the past.

After the maids served them tea, they retreated.

Zhao Mu seemed troubled and said after a moment of silence, "You should know the relation between my father and Li Yuan, right!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting that he is now impersonating as Lord Chunshen's trusted aide, who is here to help Zhao Mu dream about being King so of course he can't say that he has no idea. But the only thing he knows is that Li Yuan's sister is called Li Yanyan, and he could only remember her name because the two words in her name is the same as Ji Yanran, otherwise he would have forgotten even her name as well.

He went on bravely, "Is Marquis referring to Lady Yanyan's matter? I have always been doing work for his Highness, so I have never met Li Yuan. All these were told by his Highness personally."

Unexpectedly Zhao Mu actually nodded his head and sighed, "It's exactly this matter. Don't think that Li Yuan looks good and nice. But his level of manipulation, even all the thousand odd men and guests under my father's residence cannot

hold a candle to him. And don't think that he only came here because he was chasing after Learned Lady Ji and have the mistaken impression that he is a hopeless romantic. I'm sure there is a reason behind this. No one else is more manipulative or ambitious than him. Humph! Seems that Father did not reveal to him the secret about me, luckily so!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that the danger is not over and if he lets Zhao Mu ask him a few more questions, his identity will immediately be revealed. So taking the hint from what was said, he added, "I really have no idea why his Highness would trust Li Yuan so much?"

Naturally these words would not let any cat out of the bag.

Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, "Father is what you'll call 'an intelligent man will ultimately make a mistake due to too many responsibilities'. And the bottom line is all about women. That's right! You just came from Chu, did Li Yanyan give birth to a boy or girl?"

Xiang Shaolong now has some vague understanding but is unable to describe the whole thing so he can only say, "I only heard she was about to give birth."

A dangerous cloud loomed over Zhao Mu's face as he said angrily, "I did not expect Li Yuan to actually use the same devious trick as Lu Buwei. Father refused to believe my words. If Li Yuan gains power in future, how could he possibly agree to let Father control court affairs. This time Father is really letting the wolf into the house."

If Xiang Shaolong still does not understand, then he's better off staying at home. Zhao Mu talked about women hindering matters, and said that Li Yuan is copying Lu Buwei's plan and Lord Chunshen letting the wolf in. With these clues, he can make an accurate guess as to what is happening. He hurriedly sighed as well and said, "And who knows if this Li Yanyan is really Li Yuan's sister."

Zhao Mu replied, "That seems to be the truth. Besides when Father was on close terms with Li Yanyan, Li Yuan has no chance to meet Li Yanyan at all and Father had sent people to check on their relationship as siblings as well."

He looked at him suspiciously and added, "You should be knowing all these!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing, so it turns out that the child in Li Yanyan's stomach does not belong to Li Yuan, but to Lord Chunshen. Damn! How could he have known that the situation is so full of twists.

He replied calmly, "How could I not know. It's just that the person in charge of the investigation is called He Quan, and this person is only good at bootlicking. He's quite slipshod when it comes to other matters so I was afraid that he'll be tricked by Li Yuan."

All these are just nonsense he made up, but the aim is to gain Zhao Mu's trust. There's even the name of a person, so Zhao Mu would certainly believe him.

This evil fiend was indeed taken in and said sternly, "That is not where the problem lies. There should be no doubt that they are siblings. I didn't expect Father to be so careless."

This time Xiang Shaolong is really enlightened and have figured out the relationship between Li Yuan, his sister and Lord Chunshen.

This Li Yuan is really formidable. He first offered his sister to Lord Chunshen and after she became pregnant, let Lord Chunshen gave this beauty who is pregnant with his child to the King of Chu who is without a son. Then the child that will be born will have a bigger chance of becoming the Crown Prince. They are re-enacting the plan of Lu Buwei giving Zhu Ji to King Zhuangxiang.

After he got this clear, Xiang Shaolong was relieved and said, "Now that Li Yuan has offered himself here, this is a great chance to get rid of him. By then Li Yanyan won't be able to escape from his Highness's clutches."

Zhao Mu said seriously, "This can never be done, otherwise it will create an avalanche of problems and even I will not be able to extricate myself. Besides his swordsmanship is excellent and extremely cunning. The family warriors accompanying him this time are all highly skilled. If something goes wrong and your man gets captured by him, even I will not be able to save you."

Xiang Shaolong smiled icily, "Do not worry, I will wait until he leaves the border of Zhao before I strike."

Zhao Mu saw how much effort he is making and clasped his shoulder joyfully, saying with a frosty smile, "One need not necessarily use swords to kill, let me mull over this matter. That's right! Do you really understand the nature of horses, otherwise you may reveal your shortcomings tomorrow in front of Learned Lady Ji. Hai! This is the first time I've met such a beauty, a pity..."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Marquis please do not worry, how can I pretend to be a horse fanatic if I know nothing about horses?"

Zhao Mu replied, "I'm afraid Zhao Ya is not possible tonight, why don't I send you a few other beauties!"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Forget about it for tonight, we still have to go to Learned Lady Ji's place early tomorrow morning. Are we going separately?"

Once Zhao Mu remembered that he can see Ji Yanran again tomorrow, he was immediately energized and said, "I'll pick you up to go together."

He added with gratitude, "All thanks to you for today."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he was referring to the female assassin and after saying a few humble words, bid his farewell.

Zhao Mu sent him right to the main door and only turned back into his residence when he saw him going up the carriage and riding out under the accompaniment of his family warriors.

CHAPTER 3

The Night Is Painfully Short

[Translated by JEAN]

THE HORSE carriage trotted past the quiet streets of Handan, illuminated by the lanterns in the dark night.

As the carriage bumped around, Xiang Shaolong's thoughts were bumpy as well.

Right until this point in time, he has yet to think of any good way to capture Zhao Mu alive and cut down Le Cheng's head before escaping from Handan safely.

There was just an assassination attempt on Zhao Mu tonight so he'll definitely be extra careful in future and security will definitely be tightened. Under such circumstances, it won't be easy to kill him, much less capture him alive.

Now that the envoys from the six states are arriving one by one, the Zhaos, in order to keep this a secret and to prevent Qin spies from infiltrating the city, have now stepped up the defenses of the city by ten, or even a hundred times. Even sending someone to slip out of the city is a dangerous mission because they are now keeping detailed records of the people coming to and from the city.

Besides, his time here is limited. If the Zhaos realize that his promise of a large batch of warhorses arriving in Handan is not materializing, his situation would be far from optimistic.

Luckily a few hundred warhorses will be arriving in a few days' time and hopefully that will ease some of the wait for the Zhaos.

Being with Zhao Mu is an extremely dangerous affair; just one word spoken wrongly and he can be defeated or humiliated.

As for his personal relationships, everything is in a bigger mess.

Firstly no one can guarantee that Ji Yanran's heart will remain unchanged. With the lesson from Zhao Ya, his confidence in himself with regards to such matters is no longer the same as before.

As for his entangled relationship with Zhao Ya, he is even more bothered about it. Sometimes he finds her pitiful but most of the time he finds her hateful.

Hai! Forget it!

Just forget about her.

She is indeed a flirtatious woman, falling for every person she sees.

If that Li Yuan were to hook his finger at her, she would throw herself into his arms too.

Once he thought about this, the fire of revenge burned in him again, making him even more confused.

Zhao Zhi has obviously seen through something. A person's heart is unfathomable and if she wants to betray them, their outcome will be tragic. To be able to die in battle would be a good ending, for what they fear most is to be captured alive, for that will be a fate worse than death.

He finally returned to his residence that used to be the Hostage Residence.

Xiang Shaolong left the carriage and walked into the house.

Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and Jing Jun were all waiting for his return and followed him straight into the house with high walls, which was used to put the fake Ying Zheng in house arrest.

The three of them saw that he didn't look happy but none dared to ask any questions, only following him into the secret room then used for discussion.

After the four of them were seated, Xiang Shaolong turned his icy face towards Jing Jun and said, "Xiao Jun! What exactly have you revealed to Zhao Zhi? Do not try to hide anything."

Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo's expressions both changed.

In this dangerous place where enemies are everywhere, they are like walking on thin ice, one wrong step and their lives would immediately be in danger, not to mention if their background has been leaked.

Jing Jun was startled and lowered his head, asking in fear, "Third Brother has seen Zhao Zhi?"

Xiang Shaolong did not reveal that Zhao Zhi did not expose him directly in case Jing Jun tried to deny anything, but just nodded his head.

Teng Yi banged the table and cursed, "You're an ignorant fool who knows not the consequences. Do you want everyone to perish because of your stupidity. We have already warned you long ago."

Jing Jun smiled wryly, "That warning came too late, I've already told her long ago that we will be returning in the near future."

Wu Zhuo asked lividly, "Don't you know that Zhao Zhi is a Zhao? If her love for her country is more than her love for you, what would be the consequences."

Jing Jun replied dejectedly, "She doesn't love me at all, she only loves Third Brother."

All three were stunned.

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, "Don't sprout nonsense in order to wriggle yourself out of this."

Jing Jun said miserably, "She only regards me as a mischievous little brother. She's willing to talk to me only because she wants to know more about Third Brother."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "What did she write in her last letter to you?"

Jing Jun replied haltingly in shame, "She asked when we'll be coming to Handan and if we to be received. Ai! It's not that I have not thought of the problem that she's a Zhao, it's just that she told me she has a deep enmity with Zhao Mu, that's why I believe she will not betray us."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned. On the surface Zhao Zhi and Zhao Mu seemed to interact harmoniously, even training his courtesans for him. He can't tell anything out of the ordinary at all.

Why would she have a deep enmity?

Wu Zhuo asked, "What enmity does she has with Zhao Mu?"

Jing Jun shook his head, at a loss, "She refused to tell."

Teng Yi hesitated, "Maybe it has something to do with a woman's chastity."

Wu Zhuo asked, "Who else is there in Zhao Zhi's family?"

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo both revealed a look of attentiveness. This question is the key to everything. If Zhao

Zhi has a large family in Zhao, why would she sacrifice her whole clan because of a man. At least she cannot leave behind her birth father. But if she wants her father to leave together with her, she will never get his approval.

Jing Jun replied, "She seems to live with only her Father, I... I don't know anything at all."

Teng Yi was flabbergasted and sighed, "You're really messing things up."

Jing Jun joined because of him, so it makes him feel he needs to be responsible for everything that Jing Jun does.

Wu Zhuo asked, "Didn't you send her a reply? What did you write in the letter?"

Amongst all three, Wu Zhuo is the calmest now and all his questions are pin pointed on the most crucial aspects.

Jing Jun is after all still a child so he sobbed out his reply, "I told her we will appear in Handan in disguise, and will find a chance to make contact with her after we arrive."

Xiang Shaolong can't bear to see him thus so he patted his shoulder in consolation, "The situation is not that bad. Although she seems to have recognized me. Firstly she's still not too sure, and secondly she did not call my bluff. There's still a chance to turn the situation around. But I really do not understand, since you know that she only regards you as a younger brother, why do you still want to become entangled with her?"

Jing Jun choked, "I don't understand too. But if she becomes your woman, Xiao Jun would never have an ounce of unhappiness."

Teng Yi said calmly, "We must not let our fate be under the control of a woman's hand. Xiao Jun, show me the way, I will kill her personally to prevent any unforeseen problems."

Jing Jun's body trembled violently, his eyes wide opened in shock.

Wu Zhuo nodded his head, "This seems like the only solution."

Among the four, two has already agreed to silence her. Jing Jun was so startled that he forgot to cry but only looked pleadingly at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong thought secretly to himself that if they want to keep this a secret, they'll have to kill Tian Zhen as well and how can he bring himself to do it? He said calmly, "By doing this we will see the harm first before we see the benefits. Zhao Zhi spoke to me many times tonight and was taking special notice of me and others may have seen this happening. If she gets killed tonight immediately after seeing me once, someone will eventually pin it down to me."

Wu Zhuo said icily, "Then the other way is to turn her into your woman, so we will be able to totally control her and at the same time check her background."

Xiang Shaolong took a look at Jing Jun and saw that he was keeping silent with his head lowered and felt pity for him. He

said with a sigh, "Xiao Jun is my good brother, how can I take his love away?"

Jing Jun said with gratitude, "With Third Brother's such words, Xiao Jun can deeply feel the brotherly love we share. The truth is Third Brother has already let me enjoyed wealth and fame but I have yet the chance to repay you. This time it is I who have made the mistake and almost implicated everyone."

He suddenly knelt down and kowtowed to Xiang Shaolong, "Third Brother please do whatever you have to towards Zhao Zhi, I will sincerely accede to anything."

At this point all three knew that Jing Jun is truly in love with Zhao Zhi. In order to preserve her life, he'd rather give up his right. Seen from another point of view, it also means he's automatically giving up in order to fulfill Zhao Zhi's love towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong replied with a wry smile, "Although I have a liking for this beauty Zhao Zhi, I've never regarded it as a relationship between a man and a woman, so it's difficult for me to switch my mindset so quickly. Besides, it seems a little like I'm snatching my own good brother's woman."

Teng Yi said seriously, "Everyone knows that Shaolong is doing this for everyone's safety so there's no need for any doubt. If there's a problem, we'll have no choice but to be heartless for it's better than sitting and waiting to be killed."

Jing Jun exclaimed, "Third Brother! I'll bring you there immediately!"

Xiang Shaolong felt a headache coming on and tried to delay by revealing, "I've made contact with Ji Yanran!"

Everyone was overjoyed and pressed for news.

Xiang Shaolong told them everything that has happened during the feast. The three of them furrowed their brows deeply on hearing it. Now that there is a sudden appearance of Li Yuan, it will only bring more hindrance than help to their mission and has made the situation even more complicated.

Just as they were feeling troubled, there was a knock on the door.

Wu Zhuo revealed a look of unhappiness. Who dares to interrupt them while they are in secret discussion. Jing Jun was about to open the door when the alert Teng Yi grabbed him, afraid that others will see his swollen eyes from crying and opened the door himself instead.

The leader of the elite troops Wu Guo said at the door, "A guest who refused to reveal his identity is here to look for Master and is now waiting in the hall."

He then described this person's dressing and looks.

Everyone thought that this person could be a girl in disguise after hearing the description and they looked at one another. Could it be that Zhao Zhi has found her way here.

Xiang Shaolong stood up and said, "I'll take a look!"

Xiang Shaolong stepped into the hall and on seeing the person dashed forward happily.

The beauty who was wrapped from head to toe in a huge robe ran forward without a care into his arms, her dainty body trembling from excitement and joy.

It turns out to be the famous Learned Lady Ji Yanran.

As Xiang Shaolong felt the youthful, fiery and alluring body in his arms, all the worries and fears tonight were thrown immediately into the back of his mind.

He lifted her hood, letting her thick luscious hair fall down like waterfall as he uttered, "I didn't expect Yanran to come looking for me tonight, Xiang Shaolong is startled by such feelings."

Ji Yanran ignored the dumbfounded Wu Guo standing next to them and used all her might to hug his solid neck as she replied, "Yanran cannot wait a moment longer. Every day felt like an entire year during this half year as I suffered the pangs of missing you. If not for the fact that I could still talk about you with Mister Zou, I would not be able to tolerate it."

A beauty's generosity is immeasurable. Xiang Shaolong carried her up by her waist and told Wu Guo, "Let them know who has arrived!" and walked towards his bedroom.

Ji Yanran's pretty face immediately burned a fiery red right to her ears and although she buried her embarrassed face

into his neck, the frantic beating of her heart could not hide the mix of shyness and happiness that she really felt.

But she did not make any show of objection, her dainty body so soft that other than panting hard, she could say nothing else.

Although Xiang Shaolong is not a person who is usually in such urgent need for lust. Firstly he really misses this pretty and loyal beauty a lot, not to mention that she's extremely alluring. Most importantly he now has the intention of striking while the iron is hot, to quickly possess this beauty's body first. This is to prevent any potential problems from arising, like giving the scheming Li Yuan the chance to take advantage or if he were to use some devious methods to snatch Yanran away.

He originally had a good impression of Li Yuan, but after finding out how he and Lord Chunshen made use of his sister Li Yanyan, his impression totally changed.

The distance from the hall back to the bedroom felt as long as a whole century.

The two of them were so nervous that none spoke a single word.

After they closed the room door, Xiang Shaolong sat with her on the bed, using his strong arms to surround her so that her alluring body is sticking close to him with no space in between at all.

Xiang Shaolong kissed her slender neck and tiny ears gently, even boldly nibbling at her tender earlobes.

Ji Yanran totally melted under his ministrations, her mouth giving out alluring and soul-catching moans as her beautiful body rubbed against him.

Xiang Shaolong proceeded to caress her fragrant lips. Ji Yanran could take this no more and her fair arms entangled themselves around him as she reacted passionately.

All the suffering that came with missing him has been redeemed at this instant with the most alluring sweetness.

At this point in time both of them totally forgot about themselves, their senses in disarray as they tangled passionately. Under Xiang Shaolong's teasing, Ji Yanran's flames of desire were fanned to a peak.

Xiang Shaolong was forceful and audacious, caressing every spot, exciting her so much that her dainty body trembled and her blood surged.

She can only hear her beloved saying gently in her ears, "Yanran! Xiang Shaolong is very grateful for your love, you're so good to me."

Ji Yanran responded with a whimper, which quickly turned into moans. This man's hand has already slipped into her clothes expertly, caressing at will the forbidden places that no one has ever invaded before.

Then the clothes on her body were slowly removed piece by piece.

Ji Yanran's lids were half closed, allowing Xiang Shaolong to do as he please. Sometimes she will unintentionally block him, but it was just a symbolic show of resistance and has no actual effect at all.

Under the light from the burning red candles, her fair, flawless and beautiful body was finally revealed totally under the eyes and hands of Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong had to choose this time to nibble her earlobes and ask, "Will this be all right?"

Ji Yanran languidly opened her eyes that was filled with passion and rolled her eyes at him before nodding her head, her heart filled with willingness. She closed her eyes again. Such alluring attraction is enough to make Xiang Shaolong increase the activities on her dainty body.

After the gloriously naked body was lying flat on the bed, Xiang Shaolong stood up, admiring this beautiful body that all normal men in the world wants to possess and at the same time removing his own clothes.

Ji Yanran suddenly turned over on the bed, lifting her pretty face with much shyness as she peeked at him with lovelorn eyes and a slight smile.

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Heaven is so unfair. Yanran has seen my body long ago, but I had to wait a painful six months before I have the chance to even the score."

Ji Yanran pouted, "I only treated your injuries. The most embarrassing parts were all take care of wholly by your

Princess Qian. It's not like how you're facing me right now at all!"

Xiang Shaolong revealed his perfectly muscular and alluring male body and said with a smile, "Has Learned Lady Ji finally regained her ability to talk?"

Ji Yanran objected, "You only know how to tease me."

She really wanted to turn her head around so that she won't see this man embarrassing her but her eyes just won't listen to her and they couldn't move away from Xiang Shaolong's masculine body and neither do they not want to see him.

Xiang Shaolong knelt next to the bed, lowered his head to look at her and at the same time his hands caressed her fair back and pert bottom, saying with a sigh, "Heavens! This work of Heaven is really a very moving piece."

Ji Yanran moaned in response to his interesting and alluring words of love as she pouted, "Xiang Lang! I still have to go back before the day breaks!"

Xiang Shaolong replied with a laugh, "Then aren't you going to turn yourself around?"

This time, Ji Yanran did not obey him submissively, instead she wished that she could burrow into the bed and hide herself.

Xiang Shaolong sat on the bed and gently flipped her over.

Ji Yanran's eyes were tightly closed, her cheeks red. Her radiance was glaring, and extremely adorable.

Xiang Shaolong pressed down on her, their bodies touching without any gap in between at all and immediately this couple's temperature was raised continuously.

In the warm bedroom, rolling around under the blankets, Ji Yanran's virgin passion was ignited and she welcomed and entwined herself around Xiang Shaolong without a care.

It was only now that Xiang Shaolong was totally assured of Ji Yanran's love as he got what everyone has admired and coveted, which is Ji Yanran's precious virginity.

After the tumultuous affair, Ji Yanran's limbs were still tightly entwined around his body, her eyes closed tight and pure bliss written all over her face.

Xiang Shaolong can feel how deeply in love this beauty is with him and how much she trusts him and he can't help but feel guilty that he had ever doubted her.

Xiang Shaolong pressed his face against hers and asked gently, "Happy?"

Ji Yanran hugged him with all her might, opened her pretty eyes which showed the satisfaction and sweetness after a tumultuous night as she sighed, "I did not expect that there will be such alluring experience between a man and a woman. Yanran feels as if my life before this has been lived in vain."

Such alluring words filled with so much love is more effective than any aphrodisiac and it immediately caused another storm.

At this point in time both of them were in perfect harmony, with no hindrance at all.

Xiang Shaolong can clearly feel his intense love for her, that's why he was nervous and troubled over Li Yuan's appearance.

Ji Yanran suddenly kissed him and asked, "Are you afraid that I have fallen for that Li Yuan?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in embarrassment.

Ji Yanran replied tenderly, "You think too lowly of Yanran. I've seen countless handsome men but none other than you can make my heart beat faster. Xiang Shaolong can get Ji Yanran's heart, is not totally because he is more good looking than others, but because of his generosity, spirit, extraordinary intelligence and a heroic aura that is irresistible to others."

She lowered her head and continued quietly, "And now there's the addition of the love and entanglement, the joy between a man and a woman."

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to start round three with her but sadly the night is painfully short and with the urgent crows of the cockerel, he helped her with her robes and at the same time continued with his entanglements.

The big house that Ji Yanran is residing in is the residence of Handan's famous scholar Liu Huasheng, which is only two streets away from Xiang Shaolong's residence. Xiang Shaolong accompanied her back, choosing side streets and alleys to avoid the patrolling city guards.

Ji Yanran slipped back into the house from the back garden. Xiang Shaolong still wanted to kiss and caress her, and only released her after this beauty was suitably blushing. Only the both of them can experience the feelings of entanglement between them.

As he walked back, Xiang Shaolong was filled with the intoxicating feeling of sweetness and warmth.

Suddenly, all the worries and danger became inconsequential matters.

CHAPTER 4

Love And Hatred

[Translated by JEAN]

WITH the strong will trained from the days in the Special Task Force, Xiang Shaolong forced himself up from bed and went to the hall to see Zhao Mu.

Zhao Mu's attitude was warm as he said, "Come! Let's have a good talk."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be dismayed, "Shouldn't we be heading to Learned Lady Ji's place immediately?"

Zhao Mu forced a smile, "This morning she sent to inform me that she's feeling a little unwell so the appointment to see the horse will have to be postponed. Hai! A woman's heart is most unfathomable, especially such a rare and haughty beauty."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing and thinking what could be so unfathomable? Ji Yanran was just following his instructions to cancel the appointment to avoid any embarrassment when they meet. It's just that he did not expect Zhao Mu to come and inform him personally.

After asking the servants to leave, Xiang Shaolong sat down next to him and asked, "Did Marquis have a good sleep last night?"

Zhao Mu sighed, "I almost even didn't close my eyes. Too many things happened during the feast and even when I told myself not to think about it, my brain refuses to obey."

He continued in a quiet voice, "This time Li Yuan has brought with him a huge group of people. Those that can be considered experts are already more than 30 and they are all famous Chu swordsmen that he recently recruited to be his family warriors. Usually he keeps a very low profile in Chu in order to avoid raising Father's suspicions but he's revealing his true self once he arrived here."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Marquis, do not worry. I am confident that he will not be able to return to our Great Chu alive."

Zhao Mu was visibly touched as he looked at him and said, "Father has indeed chosen the right person to come. What is your real identity? Why have I never heard anyone mention you before."

Xiang Shaolong already has a script long prepared so he replied calmly, "My real name is Wang Zhuo, a hunter from the Xiutu Tribe. His Highness came to hunt near where I lived once and met with a pack of wolves and I saved him. Ever since then his Highness has specially groomed me and allowed my clan to enjoy wealth and riches. He is my benefactor. His Highness wants me to help you accomplish the plan of becoming the King of Zhao, therefore he has never taken me back to the residence. My trip to Handan this time is to work together with Marquis and to act when there's a chance. Won't the world belong to your Huang family sooner or later? My men are all from the Xiutu Tribe and absolutely trustworthy, so Marquis can put your mind at ease."

Zhao Mu's heart was fluttering on hearing this, thinking to himself that his Father really knows how to use people. This Wang Zhuo is not only intelligent but bold as well, not to mention his excellent swordsmanship. With this person's help and with Le Cheng's coordination, the position of Zhao Ruler will certainly belong to him. The biggest obstacles will be the two fellows Lian Po and Li Mu.

Zhao Mu said, "I've been thinking the whole night and finally thought of a workable plan, but now the time is not yet ripe. I will discuss with you again at a later date. As that

muddleheaded King Xiaocheng has very high expectations of you, you'd better show some results as soon as possible."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing that the most important part was his last sentence. He stood up and said, "Thank you for the reminder. I will immediately bring my men to the new farm outside the city to discuss how we can set up the place."

Zhao Mu's original intention was to look for him to pay a perfunctory visit to Lord Longyang, who was interested in Xiang Shaolong, so as to avoid incurring the displeasure of this powerful man from Wei. On hearing this he had no choice but to stand up as well and said, "Don't forget about Guo Zhong's feast tonight, you must come back before dusk."

Xiang Shaolong acknowledged a reply and sent him off before setting off with Wu Zhuo and the rest towards the outskirts of the city.

Wu Zhuo, Jing Jun and most of the others stayed at the Hidden Army Valley where the new farm will be, setting up tents, chopping down trees, repairing bridges and roads, pretending to be preparing for everything. Actually, they are just establishing a foothold, so that not everyone will be captured if anything happens and at the same time to prevent Jing Jun from losing patience and looking for Zhao Zhi on his own.

Before dusk, Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and 30 odd highly skilled men from the Elite team rushed back to Handan.

They had just arrived at the city gates when the official on guard duty told him, "His Majesty has orders that Mister Dong enter the Palace immediately to see him."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged looks, both feeling that something is not right for the King of Zhao would not summon him for no reason.

After they exchanged a few words, Xiang Shaolong went to the Palace to see King Xiaocheng under the escort of the Zhao soldiers.

Cheng Xu personally brought him to Wenying Hall, the place where King Xiaocheng usually work in and the person accompanying him turns out to be Guo Kai and not Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Xiaocheng's expression remained normal and put his mind at ease. After paying his respects, he sat down at his lower left, facing Guo Kai.

Cheng Xu went to stand behind King Xiaocheng.

Guo Kai gave him a look, indicating that he is taking care of him.

After asking a few questions about the farm, King Xiaocheng sighed and said, "About the farm, it's best that Mister Dong slow down the progress for the moment and try your best not to reveal anything."

Xiang Shaolong was surprised and replied, "Your subordinate will certainly obey your orders, but I wonder what is the reason?"

King Xiaocheng smiled wryly, "It is a must to establish the farm, it's just that there's a sudden setback. Let Mister Guo relate this to you!"

Guo Kai gave a dry cough before speaking with his weird voice, "It's all that Li Yuan's fault. Who knows how he managed to find out that Mister Dong trip this time is to return to your home country. When he met his Majesty this morning, he said that although you are a Zhao, you're still a subject of Chu and if we allow Mister to stay in Zhao, it will have negative impacts on both country's relations."

Xiang Shaolong is so angry his lungs are almost bursting. This Li Yuan is obviously jealous to see Ji Yanran seated on the same table as him last night and talking to him so closely, therefore he's deliberately spoiling his plans. Without a doubt, he must have said other bad things about him as well. Luckily King Xiaocheng is really in need of him, otherwise he may very well bind him up immediately and send him back to Chu.

King Xiaocheng said seriously, "Of course I will not take his comments to heart, it's just that the situation now is very delicate. His sister is the beloved concubine of the King of Chu and when the time comes for the powers to unite, if he says anything to the King of Chu and advises him not to send troops to deal with the Qins, then our 'alliance' this time will fail. That's why at this point of time we have no choice but to condescend to him."

Guo Kai added with a laugh, "Once Li Yanyan gives birth, there'll be no use even if Li Yuan talks to the King of Chu."

Xiang Shaolong laughed together with them.

Of course he knows that Guo Kai is inferring that the King of Chu is someone who will never make a woman give birth to a boy, so Li Yanyan will be no exception. But he knows that the real person who did it this time is Lord Chunshen and not the King of Chu, so there's at least a 50 percent chance that it will be a boy. Guo Kai's assumption may not be accurate. But of course he cannot be blamed, for who would have expected such a twist in this.

Xiang Shaolong had a thought and asked, "Should I keep away for a while?"

King Xiaocheng replied, "You must not, for it would mean that I would have to act according to Li Yuan's likings. I told him at that time that Mister Dong has not decided whether to stay or leave, and managed to drag this matter for now. That's why now I'm asking Mister to keep a low profile for the time being and only start on the foundations after Li Yuan has left."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly overjoyed but pretended to be helpless as he replied, "In that case I'll have to send someone out to stop the delivery of the horses which are now on their way here. But I'm afraid the earlier batch would have already arrived at the border."

King Xiaocheng replied, "If it has arrived then so be it! We do need to increase our number of warhorses, as for the rest we'll just do according to your plan."

Xiang Shaolong was just worrying that he has no excuse to send people back to Qin to report, so he hurriedly agreed.

King Xiaocheng was silent for a moment before he asked with some hesitation, "Last night the Marquis of Julu asked Mister to stay behind after the feast, what did he say to you?"

Xiang Shaolong quietly shuddered as he secretly thought this exciting. He did not expect that King Xiaocheng would actually be suspicious of his 'lover', and of course that conniving devil Guo Kai must have been stirring things up so he pretended to be surprised and exclaimed, "Is there a problem with Marquis?"

Guo Kai reminded him, "You have yet to reply to his Majesty's question?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be frightened and after expressing his apology, replied, "The Marquis of Julu opened his heart to me and said he'll take care of me so that I can work my full potential. He also said, hai..."

King Xiaocheng furrowed his brows, "Even if it involves bad things about me, Mister Dong please go ahead and repeat without fear."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "It's not really bad things, the Marquis only said that if he were to put in a few good words

for me in front of your Majesty, I'll definitely enjoy riches and wealth. Ai! I am just a boorish man and my only wish is to rear my horses in peace and to contribute some small effort to my beloved country! Not to mention riches and wealth, even life and death is of no consequence to me."

When King Xiaocheng heard how Zhao Mu tried to bribe him, he gave a cold snort. But when Xiang Shaolong 'bared his soul' in the end, he looked touched and kept nodding his head, expressing his admiration.

Xiang Shaolong continued, "The Marquis even wanted to make me stay at his residence and help me find a courtesan to spend the night with, but I thought that business is more important and adamantly refused."

Guo Kai said, "His Majesty is very impressed with Mister's devotion to work, but for the next few days you'd better just go around enjoying yourself. We have a few famous official brothels in Handan, why don't I bring you there to join in the liveliness tomorrow!"

After some idle talk, King Xiaocheng instructed him not to reveal the contents of their conversation to Zhao Mu before Guo Kai accompanied Xiang Shaolong out of Wenying Hall.

As he walked on the familiar corridors past the buildings, Xiang Shaolong's feelings can't help but well up as he thought of the tragic Lady Ni. He didn't even concentrate on Guo Kai's continuous babbling next to him.

Guo Kai saw that he looked distracted and thought that he was unhappy about Li Yuan so he consoled him, "Mister

Dong, don't be affected by people like Li Yuan. That's right! Don't you have to attend Guo Zhong's feast tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong was startled awake, secretly reprimanding himself for having mood swings at this point in time as he exclaimed, "Aren't you going as well?"

Guo Kai smiled, "I've already rejected the invitation. Ever since the arrival of the important officials from the eastern states, I've been so busy that I can't breath. Just the writing of the proposal for his Majesty is enough to make me lose sleep for a few days."

Xiang Shaolong was about to reply when a group of horsemen surrounding a horse carriage slow rode towards them from the road on the left.

A lewd look appeared on Guo Kai's face as he said quietly, "Lady Ya is here!"

Xiang Shaolong had already recognized Zhao Da and his men and has already stopped to let the group past first.

Zhao Da and the rest all paid their respects to Guo Kai.

Just as the horse carriage was about to turn into the square, the curtains of the carriage was raised, revealing a pale and tired looking Zhao Ya who is obviously lacking sleep. When she saw Xiang Shaolong, she did not reveal any look of surprise, as if she already knows that he is in the Palace. She cried out daintily, "Stop the carriage!"

The carriage and her men stopped.

Zhao Ya's pretty eyes, which were still alluring, first landed on Guo Kai's face as she said with a smile, "How are you, Official Guo!"

Guo Kai was captivated as he replied, "How can I be good when I have not played the zither or chess with Lady for such a long time?"

Xiang Shaolong was livid on hearing it and wished that he could give Zhao Ya a tight slap for she is really not showing any self-respect at all.

Zhao Ya saw Guo Kai flirting so outrageously with her in front of this horse fanatic and replied with embarrassment, "Mister Guo must be joking."

Her eyes turned towards Xiang Shaolong's face and asked gently, "Is Mister Dong going to the Guo residence. If you don't mind, why don't you go together with Zhao Ya!"

Xiang Shaolong replied icily, "Thank you Lady for your kind invitation, but I feel like walking alone so that I can think about some matters."

Guo Kai thought that he was still troubled over Li Yuan's matter so he didn't feel anything out of norm. Zhao Ya guessed that he was taking revenge on her because she had rejected him so rudely last night. She was secretly cursing this person for being so stubborn, which is so much like Xiang Shaolong.

Her heart softened as she said lightly, "In that case I will not force Mister."

The horse carriage slowly rode towards the gates of the Palace.

Xiang Shaolong rejected Guo Kai's suggestion of taking the same carriage, saying "I love riding horses, and can only feel safe and satisfied on a horse's back. Mister, please ask your guards not to follow me, let me stroll around on my own and at the same time think about some matters."

Guo Kai asked with doubt, "It's the first time you've been to Handan, how would you know how to go to the Guo residence?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, for he knows that it's easiest to let the cat out of the bag with inconsequential details such as this so he replied offhandedly, "Please do not worry, I have already asked for directions."

He jumped up his horse and left, waving his hand.

Once he left the Palace gates, Xiang Shaolong allowed his horse to stretch its legs and in a short moment, he has already caught up with Zhao Ya's carriage.

Lady Ya heard the sounds of the horse's hooves and saw him riding majestically towards her. Her pretty eyes can't help but light up, but a cloud quickly came over them again.

Ever since Xiang Shaolong left Zhao, she has felt pain that was never felt before with guilt and regret biting her heart and soul like poisonous snakes. In order to forget this man who has taken her heart, her actions became even more brazen than before. But Xiang Shaolong has always been in a

deep corner of her heart, a position that cannot be replaced. During this time she got close with Han Chuang, thinking that she can successfully forget about Xiang Shaolong. But the appearance of this Dong Kuang has ignited a wondrous excitement and memory, making her lose interest in Han Chuang.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately refused to look at her and in an instant has left her far behind.

The houses in Handan are all lighted up by now and as it's right after dinnertime, there's not much people and carriages on the streets. Everywhere was quiet and peaceful.

Xiang Shaolong thought of his beloved wives and maids in faraway Qin and felt warmth in his heart. He wished that he could capture Zhao Mu alive immediately, kill Le Cheng and return home.

While traveling up the hilly road leading to Guo Zhong's residence, he heard the sound of hooves behind him and on turning back for a look, it turned out to be Zhao Zhi coming after him.

Once Xiang Shaolong saw that it's her, he remembered Jing Jun as well as Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo's suggestion and immediately felt a headache coming on as he slowed down.

Zhao Zhi was next to him in an instant and rode together with him, looking at him deep in the eyes and said, "Mister Dong seems to be very familiar with the streets of Handan!"

Once she said that, Xiang Shaolong immediately knew that she has been following him for a distance, only choosing to catch up with him now. He was secretly lamenting as he replied, "Before I came, someone has already pointed the way here to me. Is Miss Zhi going to the Guo Residence for the feast as well?"

Zhao Zhi did not answer him but just stared at him and said, "I'm afraid Mister is deliberately lowering your voice and making it sound hoarse!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting. If she is sure that he is Xiang Shaolong, a mere fake mask won't be enough to trick her. This time he has no choice but to use love to get what he wants. He sighed and executed his special move, pressing his hand on the horse's back, jumped up into the air and just as Zhao Zhi was gasping in surprise, he landed neatly behind her. His hands went forward, tightly hugging her tiny waist that has not an ounce of extra fat, pressed his face against hers and said, "Miss Zhi's words are really strange. Why would I deliberately make my voice sound like that?"

Zhao Zhi was greatly embarrassed and she struggled hard for a while but under such a situation this would only serve to increase the contact between them. She exclaimed in surprised anger, "What are you doing?"

Xiang Shaolong chortled as his hand reached out and grabbed her chin to turn her pretty face, giving a fierce kiss on her dainty and wet lips.

Zhao Zhi moaned, as if lost in his manliness and flirtation, but was suddenly conscious as she elbowed him hard on his vulnerable armpit.

Xiang Shaolong groaned as he flipped over the horse's butt. Although it was indeed painful, it was not as bad as he exaggerated, for he just wanted to give her an opportunity to soothe her ego.

Zhao Zhi was so frightened that she turned her horse around and rode back to where Xiang Shaolong was lying. She jumped down the horse, knelt next to him and cried out, "Dong Kuang! Are you alright!"

Xiang Shaolong opened his eyes, his arms reached out and hugged her close to his body again before turning around, pressing her down on the grass at the side of the road.

Zhao Zhi's body went weak with his hug yet she is unwilling to be taken advantaged of by him. Most importantly she is still not sure if he is Xiang Shaolong, so if she allows herself to be kissed again, then won't she be betraying the man she secretly loves. Hot tears ran down her eyes as she cried out, "If you molest me again, I'll kill myself!"

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to be so protective of her chastity and formed a newfound respect for her. However he knows that if he were to leave her now, the situation would be even more embarrassing and before knowing if she has found out the truth, he cannot reveal his real identity. Therefore he can only press her down hard and asked gently, "Do Miss Zhi hate me?"

Zhao Zhi feels as if her body has no intention of rejecting him at all and was feeling both angry and troubled. She closed her pretty eyes, allowing the tears to flow freely as she said weakly, "Let me go quickly. If someone passes by and sees us, I'll be finished."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head, kissing away one of her teardrops before hugging her into a standing position and said, "Miss is too alluring, please forgive me for being unable to control myself."

Zhao Zhi seems shattered as her tears flowed like the river, shaking her head piteously and saying, "You're just making fun of me. Why do you still want to lie to me, I know that you are him."

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed and still continued talking gently in his hoarse voice, "I'll come to your house tonight to look for you, all right?"

Zhao Zhi snapped her dark eyes opened in joy and nodded her head vigorously.

Xiang Shaolong used his sleeve to wipe away her remaining tears and felt a little guilty as he said, "Come! We'll be late if we don't start moving."

Zhao Zhi struggled out of his embrace and said quietly with her head lowered, "Zhao Zhi will wait for you at home tonight."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Aren't you going?"

Zhao Zhi smiled and pouted, "You've made me look like a mess, how can I go and face others."

She jumped up her horse's back and rode out a few steps, her head turned around and hands waving, a sweet smile on her lips. The look of love on a young girl's face made Xiang Shaolong's heart skip a few beat faster.

Until she disappeared from sight, Xiang Shaolong recollected his thoughts and went towards the Guo residence to attend the feast.

Guo Fu's feast tonight has a lot less guests. Besides Zhao Mu, Le Cheng, Han Chuang and Zhao Ba, there's Li Yuan whom Xiang Shaolong does not wish to see at all and adding him and Zhao Ya, there's only seven people. Guo Zhong's two sons did not attend, for maybe they are working elsewhere.

Guo Zhong is not as warm to him as last night, instead focusing his attentions especially on Li Yuan, as if he is the main guest.

Xiang Shaolong is already used to seeing how capricious people can be and knows that Guo Zhong is deliberately treating him coldly so that he could get into the good books of Li Yuan, who can possibly become Chu's most powerful man.

Li Yuan maintained his politeness towards this love rival but Xiang Shaolong can clearly feel the hatred from him.

That's understandable, for he witnessed last night during the dance performance how Ji Yanran was talking closely with

him. With his intelligence and understanding of Ji Yanran, it's not difficult for him to see that this rare beauty has an interest in him.

After some idle talk, Zhao Mu made an excuse and pulled him aside, asking in a low voice, "Why did his Majesty summon you?"

Xiang Shaolong was waiting for this question and replied, "They asked me what have you told me last night. Of course I won't reveal the truth so I only said that we were discussing about matters concerning the setting up of the farm. Marquis! It's not I who is overly worried, but that muddleheaded ruler King Xiaocheng seems to be suspicious of you. I think Guo Kai must have secretly betrayed you!"

A frightening icy glare shot past Zhao Mu's eyes as he said with a cold snort, "I will show them my prowess at a later time!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has already forced Zhao Mu up the path of rebellion. Right at this time Zhai Ba walked over and they hurriedly changed the topic to more idle talk.

Zhao Mu said with a smile, "Your pretty disciple is not accompanying you to tonight's feast?"

Zhao Ba replied, "She should be coming. I've just sent someone to look for her."

The sounds of accessories clanging were heard as Zhao Ya floated over.

Guo Zhong expressed his apology to Li Yuan, Le Cheng and Han Chuang before going to receive her.

Zhao Ya's eyes first landed on Xiang Shaolong before moving to where Han Chuang and Li Yuan stood. She hesitated for a moment before walking towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately refused to look at her, his eyes turned to look at other places.

The layout this time was the same as the one Ji Yanran used during her feast in Daliang, with a big round table in the middle of the hall with ten seats.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly counting in his heart, even if they included Zhao Zhi, there's still an extra seat, so he wonders which esteemed guest has yet to arrive.

A fragrance wafted close and after Zhao Ya greeted the various people, she commented to Xiang Shaolong just as he turned his head back, "Mister Dong's horse is really fast, you arrived so much earlier than me."

Xiang Shaolong smiled suavely, as a form of reply.

Just at this time, someone arrived.

Under the accompaniment of two maids, a pretty young girl who has taken much care to dress up walked in gracefully. Zhao Mu and the rest all looked surprised, obviously no one knows who she is.

Guo Zhong personally unveiled this mystery. The merchant chuckled and said, “Xier’er! Come and greet our important guests.”

He then told everyone, “This is my youngest daughter Xiu’er!”

Zhao Mu exclaimed in surprise, “So it’s Master Guo’s treasured daughter. Why have you kept her away for so long, only giving us the pleasure of seeing her today.”

Xiang Shaolong had a thought, and guessed that Guo Zhong has the intention of marrying his daughter to Li Yuan so that if Zhao falls into trouble in future, they can hide in Chu, who would not be at the forefront of Qin’s attack and continue with his trade.

A great merchant like Guo Zhong whose trade is in making steel and weapons will be welcome in any country but with the protection of a powerful official like Li Yuan, things will run a lot smoother for him.

With the situation now, besides the three states, Chu is the furthest away from the invading Qins. Qi is near three states, so they face the danger of close proximity. And as for Yan, after the defeat by Tian Dan, have become weak. Only the state of Chu, which is at the far north, is still strong and still safe for the time being. As long as the three states are still around, the Chus need not worry that the Qins would risk engaging in war with another state.

The Wu family has successfully migrated to Qin, so Guo Zhong, as an astute businessman, would naturally have to plan for himself.

At this time Guo Xiu'er daintily walked to where everyone was and paid her respects.

This young lady who is not older than 16 is slim and attractive with an egg-shaped face with delicate features. Her pretty eyes look as if they could talk and as clear as autumn's water, which added to her allure. The corners of her mouth curved up slightly in a shy smile, her face radiant. Her beauty is almost comparable to Wu Tingfang. Everyone was attracted, including Li Yuan.

Guo Zhong saw what was happening and was extremely pleased so he waved and said, "Xiu'er, come quickly and greet Mister Li."

Guo Xiu'er's pretty eyes saw Li Yuan and they immediately lighted up but her head lowered shyly as she moved towards them.

Everyone immediately had the feeling that they have been disregarded while Zhao Ya's expression looked unnatural.

Zhao Mu gave a sideways look towards Li Yuan, a flash of murderous intent flashing past which he quickly covered up but it did not escape Xiang Shaolong's sharp eyes.

Zhao Ya can feel her heart inclining towards this Dong Kuang whose crudity and gentleness cannot be deciphered. She moved nearer to him and said, "Would Mister be free to

come to my place to take a look at the horses I keep, so that Zhao Ya can seek your advice on rearing horses.”

Zhao Mu thought that she has finally decided to obey him and get close to this ‘Wang Zhuo’ so he said with a smile, “It’s rare that Lady has given her invitation, so let me accept on his behalf.”

There’s no way Xiang Shaolong can make Zhao Mu lose face in public so he had no choice but to nod his head.

Zhao Ya saw how hesitant he was in agreeing so she rolled her eyes at him but did not talk about the date or time.

The gong sounded and it’s time to be seated for the feast.

CHAPTER 5

Mad With Envy And Hatred

[Translated by JEAN]

EITHER deliberately or coincidentally, Xiang Shaolong's seat was placed next to Zhao Ya, and on the other side of Zhao Ya was Han Chuang, Guo Xiu'er, Li Yuan, Guo Zhong while on Xiang Shaolong's right there were Zhao Ba, Le Cheng and Zhao Mu. Zhao Zhi's seat has been taken away.

Now everyone knows that the real main lead is Li Yuan, who is seated between Guo Zhong and his daughter. This person is a good talker and in no time at all, Guo Xiu'er was constantly covering her mouth and laughing lightly very

amicably. It seems that as soon as Li Yuan is willing to nod his head, Guo Xiu'er will belong to him.

Han Chuang is obviously very interested in this outstanding and pretty young girl but because he has to regard the State of Han's foreign relations, he dare not pit himself against Li Yuan. He concentrated on having a private conversation with Zhao Ya whereas Zhao Ya was deliberating ignoring the horse fanatic as she talked to Han Chuang in an intimate manner, constantly letting out tinkling laughs, which brought much gaiety to the feast.

In order to create more opportunities between Li Yuan and his beloved daughter, Guo Zhong, after making small talk with everyone at the table, turned to face Zhao Mu and Le Cheng who were seated on his left and engaged them in small talk, the topic of conversation always about the officials and wealthy in Handan.

Zhao Ba and Guo Zhong were personal friends so he joined this circle of conversation as well. Although Xiang Shaolong pretended to be interested and listening intently, it was obvious that Guo Zhong was disregarding him.

Xiang Shaolong knows very well that Guo Zhong has changed so quickly because Li Yuan has influenced him. From this he can see that this great merchant is feeling pessimistic about the situation in Zhao and is already having thoughts of leaving.

This thinking naturally cannot be hidden from the King of Zhao and Guo Kai, that's why the latter had reminded him to be careful of Guo Zhong.

With the Wu family gone, the State of Zhao seems to be coming to the end of her days and weakening immediately.

What is Zhao Ya's future plan?

At this time the maids came forward to pour wine for everyone.

Li Yuan turned away from Guo Xiu'er to look at Xiang Shaolong and said, "Brother Dong has traveled such a long and arduous journey to come here and I wonder for what reason?"

Everyone could hear that his tone was filled with antagonism so they all stopped talking to see how Xiang Shaolong would respond.

For the first time Guo Xiu'er raised her pretty face and eyed this burly and boorish looking man who is even bigger sized than Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong was calm and composed as he narrowed his eyes to look at him, replying offhandedly in his hoarse voice, "What Brother Li loves is beauties, what I love is handsome horses. Brother Li will go wherever the beauty goes while I will go to wherever there are fertile land and water. If Brother Li were to think about your own attitude, you will understand my attitude even more."

His reply was just appropriate.

Guo Xiu'er thought that the beauty Xiang Shaolong is talking about refers to her and was so shy that she lowered her pretty face.

The others all did not expect that this boor's argument would be so formidable and were all secretly surprised and at the same time feel a little embarrassed for Li Yuan.

Only Zhao Mu was secretly happy, for he cannot offend Li Yuan so it's most appropriate that Xiang Shaolong does it for him.

Li Yuan's expression changed slightly as a murderous look flashed past his eyes and he said coldly, "Is Brother Dong implying that the water and land in Chu cannot be compared to here?"

He had just spoken the words when he realized that he has been caught off balance, for everyone at the table are Zhao's with the exception of Han Chuang, so how can he say such words.

Indeed Le Cheng, Zhao Ba and Zhao Mu, who has long since regarded himself as a Zhao all furrowed their brows.

Xiang Shaolong saw that just a few words could force Li Yuan to stumble and was secretly overjoyed and continued nonchalantly as if he could not see Li Yuan's anger, saying "Brother Li thinks too far ahead, I'm just making an example. Actually all lands have their advantages and disadvantages. The weather down south is temperate and easy to rear horses. But the horses reared there may look handsome but are not strong and stout enough and cannot tolerate harsh

winds, rain and snow. It's difficult to rear horses in the north but the horses reared there can take hardships and there are less chances of horse plague happening there. That's why the horses of the Xiong Nus are the most famous, precisely because of the cold and hard climate that resulted in the rich quantity of excellent horses."

Everyone was impressed and did not expect Xiang Shaolong to have such insight. He also managed to insinuate with sarcasm that Chu, which is in the south, are engrossed in merrymaking and doesn't strive for improvement at all. Whereas the states in the north, including the formidable Qin, may be engaged in wars year after year but this has made them groom many a talent and their reputation is higher than the once powerful Chus.

This is indeed a fact. Ever since the tiny Yue successfully attacked Chu, their pride has taken a beating. Adding on to this is their constant failures in their strategies that made their situation go on a downturn.

The first time the six states joined forces to attack Qin, it is King Huai of Chu who takes the lead but in practice only Han and Zhao are taking part in the war. The two states were greatly defeated by the Qins at Xiuyu, which was within the Han borders while Qi turned around and attacked Zhao and Wei, creating internal strife. Hence Qin took the opportunity to eliminate Ba and Shu, thus increasing their territory twofold, making it close to the size of Wujun and Qianzhong in Chu. Thus the nightmare of the Chus began, letting them taste the bitter outcome of being just 'onlookers'.

All along, the Qins are most worried about Qi and Chu joining forces, therefore the Qins ceded some territory to cajole King Huai of Chu to break his friendship with the Qis. However, they went back on their words once they got what they wanted, greatly defeating the Chu army at Danyang, where 80,000 people were killed and took over Hanzhong in Chu. They then proceeded to take over Zhaoling, making them totally lose control over the northwest areas of Yingdu.

This is not the only insensible act committed by King Huai of Chu. Just as he has agreed to work with Qi again, he was again enticed by the Qins and once again changed his mind suddenly, even to the extent of having a marriage agreement with the Qins.

Qi, Wei and Han were furious and sent their troops to attack Chu for going back on the treaty and King Huai was so astounded that he ordered the Crown Prince to go to Qin to ask for Qin reinforcements. The three states then had no choice but to retreat. Later the Qins found an excuse to attack Chu and using coercion and persuasion, managed to trick this brainless King into Qin and imprisoned him. He failed in escaping and ended up dying of illness in Qin.

When his son King Qingxiang of Chu ascended the throne, he tried to seek revenge and after being threatened by the Qins, he was immediately scared shitless. Not only did he beg for reconciliation, he even asked for a marriage agreement with the Qins. Like his father, he added another muddled event in their history.

Therefore Xiang Shaolong's words hinted at how the Chus have destroyed their own country because of the people and not because of wars. The most impressive part was that he was insinuating that although Li Yuan looks able, he is in fact a useless man and cannot survive any setback.

Zhao Ya and Guo Xiu'er, eyed both of them with their sharp woman's intuition and they could feel that Li Yuan is like the good looking horses of the south whereas this Dong Kuang is an excellent horse from the north that can withstand hardship. The impression of Li Yuan dropped by a few notches in their hearts.

Guo Zhong looked at Xiang Shaolong in surprise as he reconsidered if it is really most appropriate to hide from Qin in Chu.

Xiang Shaolong argued from an irrefutable point, proving the Chu's fatal weaknesses are indecisiveness, irresoluteness and fear of hardship, each point of his argument drawing blood.

Li Yuan's face alternated between turning red and pale but he was speechless. What can he say when on the surface, the other party is talking about horses?

Guo Zhong chortled as he tried to smooth things over and said, "Mister Dong's words are always about horses, a horse fanatic indeed. Come! Let's drink a toast."

Everyone raised their cup with the exception of Li Yuan, who was stony faced and did not follow suit, giving others the impression that he was being petty.

After Zhao Ba finished his drink, he raised his cup again, which has just been filled by the maid. He raised his cup towards Li Yuan and Han Chuang and said, "To the cooperation between Han, Chu and Zhao, let us drink a toast!"

Li Yuan seems to have thought of something and his expression returned to normal, looking calm and suave as he raised his cup and drank with a smile. Only then did the tense atmosphere relax a little.

Han Chuang said, "I heard that the King of Qi placed much importance in this meeting in Handan and the Premier Tian Dan is rushing here personally. He'll be here within these two days."

Zhao Mu and Le Cheng already knew about this long ago. But for the rest it's the first time they've heard of it and they were all excited.

Tian Dan can be considered the real ruler of Qi, without the title. His reputation is comparable to Prince Xinling of Wei.

Eight years after the death of King Huai of Chu, the State of Chu was getting weaker while the State of Qi is shining bright, stable enough to fight Qin as an equal. Right at this time, the Qis fell into the Qin's trap and accepted King Zhaoxiang of Qin's suggestion to regard the King of Qin as the Emperor of the West while the Qis will be the Emperor of the East. Meaning that Qin and Qi will split the world equally.

Although two days after declaring himself Emperor, the King of Qi was persuaded by his officials to rescind the title of Emperor, but it did nothing to quell his ambition. He subsequently invaded towards the north and south, first destroying Song, then swallowing up a few small states, taking over lots of land but the country's resources were greatly depleted as well due to the invasions, giving Qin, Chu, the three states as well as Yan the opportunity to invade Qi. The Yan general Yue Yi invaded Linzi⁸ and within five years took over 70 odd cities, leaving only Ju and Jimo.

Tian Dan is a person who rose up in fame during such difficult times. He was a distant relative of the King of Qi and was initially a minor official in the Palace. Before the Yan army invaded the city, he told his clansmen to saw off the ends of the carriage axles so that when escaping, the carriages will not break down due to the constant knocking against each other and thus successfully escaped. Just this trick of his has revealed his potential of being wise and calm in the face of adversity.

When the Yans attacked Jimo, everyone supported him to be the Commander and right at that time King Zhao of Yan had just passed away. And the new King of Yan fell into Tian Dan's scheme, replacing Yue Yi with a useless general. Once this person came, Tian Dan easily swept the Yans out of their borders, and his most famous maneuver was using the Fiery Cow Formation to greatly defeat the Yan army.

⁸ Linzi – Capital of Qi

Although Tian Dan's fame spread because of this, the State of Qi fell into difficulties, barely surviving until now.

Xiang Shaolong wanted to continue listening when Zhao Ya who was next to him took over the wine bottle from the serving maid and topped up Xiang Shaolong's empty cup with the fragrant wine. Her eyes bright as she said softly with a smile, "Mister Dong! If there is anywhere Zhao Ya has offended you, please accept this cup of wine as apology!"

Han Chuang was still talking and did not take notice. Only Li Yuan's eyes flashed a strange glint as he started thinking.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly furious. This woman is really fickle. She was just being all over Han Chuang earlier and now that she was moved by his words, she's trying to get into his good books. However, he has not reached the stage where he would be so ill mannered as embarrass her publicly so he raised his cup and said without feelings, "Lady thinks too much, how could you have offended me! Let me drink a toast to Lady!"

Zhao Ya's pretty eyes looked at him deeply as she raised her cup to drink.

Only now did Han Chuang notice that the secret undercurrent between the two of them and a look of unhappiness flashed past his face. If they are in Han, with his position, he'll definitely teach Xiang Shaolong a good lesson but now he can only seethe in his heart.

Li Yuan chortled and said, "Lady! I have yet to offer you a toast today."

He raised his cup and offered her a toast from afar.

Although Zhao Ya's good impression of him has been slightly reduced, she still has a slight liking for him. This person's attitude was cold to her last night and yet now he is making the first move to flirt with her and she can't help but feel pleasantly alarmed as she raised her cup in bewilderment and drank.

Xiang Shaolong knows that Li Yuan is making use of Zhao Ya to give him a blow but he still felt fury rising from his heart, hating Li Yuan and at the same time angry with Zhao Ya for her lack of self respect. Of course on the surface he did not reveal any of his feelings at all.

Li Yuan is not willing to let the matter pass so he continued his flirtation with Zhao Ya, "Lady is such a good drinker. Why don't we find a night and I'll drink with Lady, let's see who will get drunk first."

Once he said that, among the nine of them seated at the table, four of them had an uneasy expression on their faces.

The ones who look most affected was Guo Zhong and Guo Xiu'er, for they both felt that he is not showing them respect by publicly flirting with this beauty who is famed for her wantonness.

Han Chuang transferred his jealousy towards Xiang Shaolong to this newly appeared love rival.

Zhao Mu's expression was also very unnatural, staring at Zhao Ya angrily, wanting her to say something to reject him.

Zhao Ya did not expect the other party to be so bold as to openly invite her for a night of tryst during the feast. Reject? But she can't bear to. Accept? This man who seems even more charismatic than Li Yuan would look down on her. Her intelligent eyes rolled and she replied, "Since Mister Li is in such high spirits, Zhao Ya will find a day to throw a feast at my residence. Mister must not say that you are not free when the time comes!"

Her pretty eyes then surveyed everyone else as she continued with laughter, "All of you will come and bear witness as to which of us will become drunk first."

Li Yuan was slightly taken aback, for he did not expect this slut to actually reject his advances and can't help but seriously take a look at her for the first time.

Ever since his heart and mind has been taken over by Ji Yanran, he rarely pays any attention to other women. Now that he's looking in detail, he realizes that Zhao Ya is like a fresh flower that has bloomed, with indescribable charm and style and extremely alluring. Such mature beauty is of another description altogether. And on the surface she may look like a flirt and extremely radiant but there's an underlying grace and elegance that no one will dare to belittle. He can't help but feel tempted and only now did he understand why Han Chuang would be so enamored with her.

Li Yuan smiled suavely, "Once the date is set, please send someone to inform me."

Right at this time Zhao Ba interrupted them and everyone started talking about other topics.

Zhao Ya leaned towards Xiang Shaolong and asked quietly, "Satisfied?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling smug, knowing that this wanton woman has once again surrendered to his alternate identity but before he had a chance to talk, Guo Xiu'er stood up and said with a wooden expression, "Sorry! Xiu'er feels a little unwell and would like to go back to my room to rest."

A look of unhappiness showed on Li Yuan's face but he did not say anything.

Everyone knows that this rich young missy is throwing her tantrum at Li Yuan.

Guo Zhong said helplessly, "Help Miss back to her room!"

Immediately the maid came forward to escort this pretty girl out of the hall.

The atmosphere is once again awkward. Without Guo Xiu'er, the feast has lost some of the festivity. Luckily, there is still Zhao Ya to hold the fort.

Zhao Ba had a drink too much and his suddenly felt like talking. He made Xiang Shaolong talk with him about what he feels about swordplay, saying "People learning swordplay nowadays, many of them are anxious for quick results, having only the style but lacking the coordination stability and foundation. They don't even place much importance in training the strength around their waist. They are strong

with their arms but weak in their wrists, not knowing that the combination of waist, arms, wrists and foundation are essential in exhibiting the essence of swordplay. Knowing how to make use of strength is the most important requirement.”

Li Yuan was proud and obviously holds no regard for this highly respected swordsman of Zhao as he said nonchalantly, “I think it’s useless to have only brute strength, otherwise Xiao Weimou won’t be killed by Xiang Shaolong!”

The name ‘Xiang Shaolong’ is now a taboo topic for everyone in the city and with the exception of Han Chuang, everyone else was taken aback.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed to hear his name being mentioned. He glanced quickly towards Zhao Ya only to see her expression darken as she fell into a daze.

Han Chuang said arrogantly, “A pity he escaped to Qin, otherwise I definitely want to try how formidable his swordplay can be.”

Zhao Mu replied through gritted teeth, “Won’t you have the chance once we attack Xianyang in future?”

Zhao Ba was unhappy with Li Yuan’s interruption but he could not win the argument so he said solemnly, “Mister Li is famous in Chu for your swordsmanship. I wonder if you can find a day to come to my school so that it can be an eye-opener for me.”

Li Yuan's eyes flashed as he nodded his head, "Every time I go someplace, I like to find the most famous swordsman of that place to exchange pointers. Headmaster Zhao's suggestion is precisely what I would have wanted."

This time even Le Cheng was annoyed by this person's arrogance and said to Zhao Ba with a laugh, "Mister Li is so valiant. Headmaster, please set a date and time so that we can admire Mister Li's excellent swordplay."

Zhao Ba was obviously secretly livid as he said, "I am getting a little impatient, why not do it tomorrow! We shall see what time is most convenient for Mister Li."

Li Yuan replied smugly, "Not tomorrow, for I've made a date with Miss Ji Yanran to tour Handan. Why don't we change it to noon the day after!"

Everyone was taken aback and all of them looked both envious and jealous.

Xiang Shaolong's heart sank and turned cold. Why did Ji Yanran agree to accept this person's invitation? He must get an explanation from her.

Zhao Ya's expression was wooden. Naturally she would not feel good to have her thunder stolen by Ji Yanran.

The atmosphere of the feast is now broken beyond repair and Zhao Ba was the first to give an excuse to leave, followed by Zhao Ya.

Han Chuang stood up and said, "Let me accompany Lady Ya back!"

Zhao Ya was troubled and creased her brows as she replied with a shake of her head, "I appreciate Marquis Pingshan's kind intentions, but Zhao Ya's head is feeling a little heavy and would like to have some peace alone."

A look of unhappiness flashed past Han Chuang's face as he said icily, "Whatever Lady wishes then!"

Zhao Mu stood up and said, "Let's leave together! I'm in the mood for talk, so who is willing to share my carriage."

He gave Xiang Shaolong a look.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly nodded his head and said, "I'm the only person who came alone, let me accompany Marquis then!"

Zhao Ya looked at Xiang Shaolong with puzzlement, feeling dubious about their relationship.

Everyone bid their farewells and left the Guo residence separately.

Inside the carriage, Zhao Mu said, "I did not expect Mister to have such a sharp tongue, even the glib tongued Li Yuan couldn't fend you off. I wonder if you're confident of winning the sword in his hand. From what I know this person is truly skilled."

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, "Confidence is besides the point. It's just that only wooden swords are used to exchange pointers in the dueling ring, not as if there's a fight for life and death at all..."

Zhao Mu interrupted him, "I just want to put him down a peg or two, not kill him. That fellow is too detestable. If I capture him, I'll definitely fuck him until he feels that death would be a better choice."

Goose pimples rose immediately on Xiang Shaolong's skin as he gave a cold shiver.

CHAPTER 6

Sisters In Trouble

[Translated by JEAN]

AFTER returning, Teng Yi said quietly to him, "Yanran is waiting for you at the inner hall."

Xiang Shaolong was just about to look for her and quickened his steps on hearing that.

Teng Yi ran after him and asked, "Why did the King of Zhao summon you?"

Xiang Shaolong was embarrassed and stopped to tell him briefly what happened and laughed, "We're considered

lucky, there should be no problem if we stay in Handan for one to two more months.”

Teng Yi gave him a push and said, “Go in quickly! You’re really lucky in love.”

Xiang Shaolong did not expect this burly man to suddenly utter such a phrase. Obviously Shanlan has changed him a lot. He replied with a smile and walked towards his bedroom.

He had just closed the door when the great beauty Ji Yanran ran into his arm with a gush of fragrance, her passion so fiery that he almost melted.

Women who have just started eating the forbidden fruit will be especially clingy and Learned Lady Ji is no exception. After the joining, they started talking, limbs entwined.

Before Xiang Shaolong had a chance to ask her about Li Yuan, this beauty admitted it first, “Xiang Lang, please don’t blame Yanran. I’ve agreed to go with Li Yuan tomorrow to Lake Feng at the south of the city to admire the red leaves. Hai! This lovelorn person is really sincere, to run after me all the way from Chu and kept on pleading with me. Yanran had no choice but to entertain him a little. I will then find a chance to clarify with him my stand and tell him to give up on me.”

Xiang Shaolong remained silent on hearing how Ji Yanran is still treating Li Yuan so nicely. Ji Yanran pouted a little, “Are you unhappy? It’s just a normal outing! If you’re still worried, I’ll ask Mister Zou to come along.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed and said, "From my observation and information obtained, this person's interior is not as good as his exterior. But if I say this at this point of time, it would seem that I lack graciousness."

Ji Yanran disengaged herself from his arms and sat up on the bed, revealing her perfect upper body to his eyes as she said unhappily, "Do you think I am a person who would see you as someone carrying tales? I already belong to you while in Daliang, so why should you be afraid to speak your mind."

Xiang Shaolong pulled her back into his arms, flipped her over and pressed down on her, telling her how he made use of Li Yanyan to take part in the evil scheme set up by Lord Chunshen, and also what happened at the feast tonight.

When Yanran heard how Li Yuan was pressurizing the King of Zhao to deal with her 'Xiang Shaolong', and how he publicly announced during the feast about his appointment with her, her expression changed and she said, "I did not expect him to be such a shallow and conniving person, Yanran must really be blind."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "This person may have had a hard time suppressing himself in Chu. So now that he's in Zhao, he would reveal the real him when he's not afraid that others will know."

Ji Yanran breathed out a gush of cold air as she said, "Luckily Xiang Lang has reminded Yanran, so I won't be taken in by him. Hai! When can Xiang Lang take me to Xianyang? It's

really torturous being so secretive. Mister Zou is also very envious of Qin and hopes that he can go there quickly.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “Who wouldn’t want to leave this godforsaken place? It’s just that now we still have to wait for the right time.”

Ji Yanran sat up unwillingly and said, “I have to go. This time you don’t have to send me off, it’ll be difficult to argue if someone bumps into us.”

Then added with a smile, “Why don’t we put on another show, the title of the act will be called ‘The Horse Fanatic gets Ji Yanran’. If we can infuriate that Li Yuan to death, won’t it be fun? Then we don’t have to be so secretive and scared all the time. I can even openly move in to stay with you.”

Xiang Shaolong sat up, hooking his arm around her pretty neck and tasted the lipstick on her pink lips again as he said, “It’s ‘The Horse Fanatic having sole possession of Beauty Ji’, or maybe ‘Fanatic Dong flirts with pretty Yanran’. This is a very tempting thought, but if it incurs the jealousy of Lord Longyang, then it’ll be really terrible.”

Ji Yanran replied with a smile, “This Lord Longyang likes to think that he’s smart. If we do it just right, seemingly having feelings at times, moving along in steadily, it will instead quell his doubts and it will even make him think that I have nothing to do with that Xiang Shaolong. Otherwise why would I have fallen for another man. She added with a sweet smile, “The terms Xiang Lang uses are the best in the world.”

After being on cloud nine, Xiang Shaolong thought over it and found it reasonable and was greatly energized. If he can eliminate Lord Longyang's suspicions of Ji Yanran. It'll be easier for their mission in future. Otherwise if they let this man-woman find out about their affair, his identity may be revealed immediately. Because there's no way for him to hide if they decide to look at his false face in detail.

To the Zhaos, it's better to let him get Ji Yanran than to let Li Yuan have the advantage. The two of them were so excited they started their entanglements again before discussing the details.

Xiang Shaolong remembered Zhao Zhi, and it was only after much persuasion that Ji Yanran reluctantly left him quietly.

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity to take a nap after Ji Yanran left and Teng Yi woke him up at midnight.

This guesthouse originally had a housekeeper and a group of servants but they have been transferred to work at the outer residence to stop them from being a hindrance.

While he was washing up, Teng Yi said from behind him, "A few suspicious looking men started hiding around the front of the street and back alley an hour ago. I wonder who they could be. Really feel like going out to teach them a lesson."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "It's easy to teach them a lesson. We just have to inform Zhao Mu tomorrow. That conniving thief will certainly have his ways to find out who they are."

Teng Yi said, "Be careful when you go out. I think I'd better go with you, at least I can take care of you."

Xiang Shaolong guffawed, "I'm just going for a rendezvous, why would I need to be taken care of."

Teng Yi no longer insisted and changed the topic, "When do you intend to make contact with the two groups belonging to Pu Bu and Zhao Da?"

Xiang Shaolong wore his mask and said, "We can only decide on this at a later date, and we must not let them know that Dong Kuang is Xiang Shaolong. A person's heart is unfathomable, who knows if any one of them would betray us?"

Teng Yi heaved a sigh of relief and said, "I'm relieved to know that you can think it this way."

Xiang Shaolong gave him a strong hug around the shoulders and after he helped him with wearing his full gear, he climbed over the wall and left the residence, turning into the dark streets.

Although it's late in the night, there are still carriages and people on the streets as well as patrolling guards. The cities of this era are huge and not as densely populated so general security is still good.

Keeping alert along the way, he reached his destination an hour later. He's still worried about being followed so he deliberately hid on a tree, waiting until he was sure no one

was following before jumping down and walking into the bamboo forest next to Zhao Zhi's house.

It was an ordinary house, only slightly bigger than the average home. What's special is that there's a small river on the left while this bamboo forest is on the other side, separating this house from the nearby houses. This bamboo forest is also the path that one must go past in order to reach the house.

Xiang Shaolong cast aside his remorse towards Jing Jun, consoling himself by thinking that small details should not be haggled over if one wants to accomplish big things before walking out of the bamboo forest.

The deep barks of dogs were heard, then they were silent. Obviously Zhao Zhi had stopped them.

Zhao Zhi's residence is split into the front, middle and back, with a small courtyard at the back planted with flowers and trees. The surroundings have a quiet elegance.

The rooms at the back were joined with the garden so he only have to climb the wall into the back courtyard and will easily reach Zhao Zhi's bedroom.

Right at this time, the lamp in one of the rooms was lighted, and then extinguished again. It continued for three times before it remained lit.

Xiang Shaolong knows that this is Zhao Zhi's signal, and excitement welled in his heart from having an illicit affair. Zhao Zhi wins in being matured enough, a unique character

and style that can intoxicate a person. The deepest impression she gives is that although she is not past 20, she has an air of weariness as if she has been through a lot. It seems that she must have had a sad past.

Xiang Shaolong knows that there's not much time left. A moment of night is worth a thousand taels of gold. He moved swiftly, climbing over the wall into the house and entering through the window.

It turned out to be a small study, simply and comfortably decorated. Zhao Zhi was wearing a pale maroon long dress, lounging on a rectangular bed, the table next to her filled with fine wine and snacks, looking at him climbing in through the window with a smile.

Xiang Shaolong was about to smile in return when an alarm suddenly went off in his heart but before he had the time to react, something is already pressing down on his waist from the back.

The reason why he did not have a proper feel is because it's separated by the belt that was filled with flying needles tied around his waist.

A low but melodious female voice behind him said, "Don't move, unless you can move faster than the specially made mechanical strong bow."

Xiang Shaolong felt the voice sounded familiar but he could not remember who this person threatening him from the back could be.

Zhao Zhi jumped up excitedly and exclaimed with a dainty smile, "Everyone keeps saying how formidable Xiang Shaolong is, but he still fall into us sisters' trap."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing dryly, this is the second time he got cheated by a woman. Maybe this is a man's greatest weakness, always putting their guards down when faced with a pretty woman.

But he was feeling puzzled. If Zhao Zhi wants to deal with him, she just has to run out to the streets and start shouting and he'll be done for, so why would she go through so much trouble to deal with him privately.

Or could it be she still has feelings for that dead Lian Jin? She won't feel happy unless she kills him personally? He pretended to be surprised and said, "What is Miss Zhi talking about? Who is Xiang Shaolong?"

Zhao Zhi exclaimed angrily, "Still denying! Haven't you already admitted while on the road to the Guo Residence?"

Xiang Shaolong deliberately antagonized her, "Who told you that I am Xiang Shaolong?"

Thinking back, Zhao Zhi realized that indeed he has not admitted to it but at that time his mannerisms and the way he talked is exactly like Xiang Shaolong. Now that he is denying it, it's obvious he's making a fool of her.

The lady behind him, who could either be Zhao Zhi's younger or older sister, said in a low voice, "If you're not Xiang

Shaolong, than my only choice is to silence you immediately so that our secret will not be leaked.”

Xiang Shaolong’s heart shook, he finally recognized that this lady behind him is the female assassin who tried to assassinate Zhao Mu twice, the first time was a mistaken attack on the carriage and the other time happened the night before, which was thwarted by him.

What he couldn’t figure out earlier suddenly became clear. No wonder the female assassin could sneak into the Marquis Residence, all because of Zhao Zhi who helped with the spying.

He sighed and said, “Then I’m dead for sure, because I don’t even know who Xiang Shaolong is. I thought it’s because Miss Zhi had taken a special liking to me...”

The lady behind said fiercely, “If you say one more time that you’re not Xiang Shaolong, I’ll retaliate immediately!”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly sniggering and thinking it’ll be a miracle if she can shoot past those steel needles and said with a cold snort, “I, Horse Fanatic Dong Kuang, never likes to be threatened and neither am I afraid of death. If I am not Xiang Shaolong, I am not so why should I pretend to be. If you don’t believe me you can come and scrutinize my face to see if I have done anything to it?”

This is called making a calculated bet, betting that never in their dreams would they imagine that in this world, there will be such a leather mask made so delicately by Xiao Yuetan and this mask has a natural stickiness that will stick

so perfectly onto skin that not a gap can be found such that even facial expressions can be shown. If one doesn't know how, it won't be easy to remove the mask at all.

Zhao Zhi was momentarily stunned and came forward, extending her hand to touch his face.

Zhao Zhi touched and grabbed for a while before her expression changed thoroughly as she exclaimed, "Heavens! You're really not him!"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I may not be Xiang Shaolong, but please don't shoot, otherwise it will be a lose-lose situation."

The two women were equally stunned and knew that something is not right.

Fast as lightning, Xiang Shaolong escaped from between the women and came to Zhao Zhi's back, his hand pulling out the dagger at his waist smoothly and placed it across Zhao Zhi's neck while his other hand was wrapped around her alluring waist, taking control of the situation.

That lady raised her strong bow, aiming at them but she dare not shoot.

Xiang Shaolong pulled Zhao Zhi along as he backed up to the wall before he steadied his nerves to weigh this female assassin whose swordsmanship and stratagems are both astounding.

She is a little shorter than Zhao Zhi, looks about 70-80% similar to her, but is more fair and delicate looking. Her eyes are sharp, with a hardness and viciousness that Zhao Zhi

lacks. She is a little older, her body graceful and packed with power and now she looks like a female leopard that's about to find someone to bite.

Xiang Shaolong asked with a smile, "How do I address this elder sister here?"

Zhao Zhi ignored the sharp knife pointed at her throat and cried out piteously, "Eldest Sister release the arrow quickly, otherwise not only won't we be able to take revenge, living will become even worse than dying."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved for he knows that Zhao Zhi really believe that he is that horse fanatic Dong Kuang so he hurriedly said, "We can talk things over slowly. I can swear not to reveal your secret. I'm a man of my words and will never go back on my promises."

The two of them can't help but look at each other. Since this person is not Xiang Shaolong, there's no reason for him to let them off. This is too illogical.

Xiang Shaolong did not give them a chance to speak. He first made a very deadly vow in Dong Kuang's name before saying, "Elder sister, put down your bow and arrow and I'll release your sister."

The pretty female assassin replied resentfully, "Who is your Elder sister?"

But her hands naturally loosened the hold on the strong bow, throwing the bow and arrow aside, so coolly that it seems a little irrational.

Xiang Shaolong was thinking that this beautiful tigress is quite straightforward so he kept the dagger that was placed on Zhao Zhi's pretty neck.

Right at this time, he saw this woman give an eye signal to Zhao Zhi and knows that something is not right so he hurriedly move to the side and just happened to avoid Zhao Zhi's elbow.

That lady let out a high pitched whistle and at the same time pulled out the long sword from her back and launched an attack towards him.

Xiang Shaolong was furious. He was kindhearted enough to make a deadly vow not to reveal their secret because he did not want to silence them but not only did they not appreciate it, they are trying to silence him in turn. Blood Wave came out of its sheath lightning fast.

There was a strange sound coming from the door and he turned his head around to take a glance and secretly cursed. It turned out to be a large yellow dog, running through the door in an alarming speed, revealing its white teeth, the nostrils flaring and a thunderous growl from deep within its throat, jumping towards him. He suddenly realized that her whistle earlier was to summon this ferocious dog to help her.

Luckily in the past, one of the modules he was trained in was how to deal with aggressive dogs and although he has never put it to the real test, he had trained and fought with the military dogs that were even more muscular than this yellow

dog. He swept his sword across to block the coming stab from the other party, lowered his body and kicked sideways, aiming right at the lower jaw of the ferocious dog that was in midair jumping towards him.

The beast howled as it was kicked aside and tumbled to the ground, unable to get up for the time being.

Zhao Zhi managed to grab a sword from somewhere and coordinated her attack with her sister, one attacking from the left and the other from the front. For a moment swords were flashing everywhere.

Xiang Shaolong knows that this two ladies are formidable but he has long since familiarized himself with the three killer moves of the Mohist addendum so his swordplay is not as unskilled as in the past. Since the ferocious dog has not pounced again, he took the chance to dash to the side of the elder sister and using all his tactics, slashed his sword down from the top.

The elder sister was shocked. It turned out that Xiang Shaolong's move was excellent and wondrous, for it can keep on changing in such a narrow space, making one totally clueless as to what is happening. She gritted her teeth and attacked the onslaught, not caring about the enemy's sword at all as she aimed lightning fast towards Xiang Shaolong's heart, absolutely having the intention of dying together.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly admiring her character and this is just what he wanted as well. He had crossed swords with her before and knows that the style of her swordplay is fast

and ever changing and if someone unskilled fights with her, that person may be dead even before he gets to touch her sword. This is also a woman's distinctive way of using the sword so that they need not match their strength against men who are stronger by nature.

He immediately changed his move and swept his sword across to block. 'Clang!'

The sound reverberated sharply, the pretty assassin's sword was blocked by Xiang Shaolong's sword.

Since she wants to launch an attack against another attack, she will have to use all her might and there is no room for retreat and this instead gave Xiang Shaolong the chance to use all his strength to fight with her.

Besides Xiao Weimou and Teng Yi, Xiang Shaolong's waist and arm strength can be considered unbeatable. No matter how formidable she is, she is still a woman and restricted by her nature. As the swords struck at each other, the vibration caused her wrists to go numb and she retreated in astonishment.

Xiang Shaolong thought that he would be able to disarm her but who would have expected her to tolerate the effects, although barely. She gave a cold snort as she rolled towards the ground.

Zhao Zhi did not expect this horse fanatic to have such shocking swordsmanship. Just as she was about to run up to help out, her retreating sister happened to knock into her and both of them tumbled back.

Right at this time that yellow dog came back again and was about to pounce on Xiang Shaolong. Zhao Zhi cried out in alarm, "Dahuang! No!"

By this time Xiang Shaolong is already holding the bow in his right hand and an arrow in his left hand, aiming towards the top agilely towards that Dahuang.

This dog is very smart and well trained by the two ladies. Once it saw the arrow pointing at itself, it gave a low moan and hid behind the two ladies.

Xiang Shaolong held the bow with his right hand and the sword with his left hand, pointing it at the two terrified ladies and asked with a smile, "What is elder sister's name, so that I know how to address you."

The two ladies were still feeling unsettled and cowered at the corner of the wall, not daring to move at all. In such a narrow space and short distance, it is ridiculous to think that one can fend off the light arrow shot by the strong bow.

The elder sister is very stubborn, her lips were drawn tight and she did not answer him. Instead it was Zhao Zhi who blurted out, "Her name is Tian Rou!"

Xiang Shaolong was surprised, "Shouldn't her surname be Zhao?"

Zhao Zhi realized that she has slipped up and her face turned pale.

Xiang Shaolong and that Tian Rou looked at each other. He thought that since her surname is Tian, maybe she is related

to Tian Dan. Zhao Mu has all along been in cahoots with Tian Dan, otherwise he wouldn't be in secret contact with Xiao Weimou. Once he thought of this, he had a slight idea of what's happening so he pretended to be furious as he stared widely and said, "I actually had the intention of letting both of you go, but a pity that your surname is Tian and I hate people with this surname. Now I can only abandon all thoughts of taking pity on beauties and send you back to where you came from before you were born. You should be grateful to me for giving you an easy death."

Zhao Zhi looked at the bow and arrow he held in his hand and trembled, "Why do you hate those with the surname Tian so much."

Tian Rou hissed angrily, "Zhizhi! Don't talk to him, let him kill if he wants to!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling perplexed, could it be that there's only these two sisters in this house. Otherwise with such a commotion going on, not a single person has appeared. And where has Zhao Zhi's 'father' whom she lives with hidden himself? Once he thought of this, he saw the ears of the yellow dog which Zhao Zhi was holding on to perk up as its eyes shot to attention. He secretly understood and shouted, "Don't come in, otherwise I'll shoot immediately."

The two ladies were shocked. They did not expect that he'd actually detect their help who is stealthily nearing them soundlessly and suddenly a sense of weakness and

helplessness welled up in them as they felt that there's no way they can deal with this person.

Xiang Shaolong looked at Zhao Zhi and said, "Since you are already at death's door, there's no need for me to hide anything from you. The reason why I hate people with the surname Tian, is because one of them is called Tian Dan!"

The two ladies were momentarily stunned as they stared at him. Xiang Shaolong moved forward slowly, his arrow moving up and down so that the two ladies have no idea the targeted area he has chosen.

A very tempting thought occurred to him. He just have to shoot Tian Rou, then use his flying needles to deal with the person outside the door and Zhao Zhi. He is 100% sure that he can swiftly deal with all three of them and that will settle everything and there'll be no need to trouble himself over them anymore.

A old sounding voice outside the door shouted, "Hero please have mercy, Tian Dan is also the enemy of my two Missies, we're all on the same side."

Tian Rou and Zhao Zhi cried out in unison, "Uncle Zheng!"

Xiang Shaolong said with a frosty laugh, "How do I know if this is true? I deliberately told you this so that I can force myself to harden my heart and silence you. Otherwise if you leak this out, and Zhao Mu, who is in cahoots with Tian Dan, finds out, I'll be dead. Or maybe you still do not know that Tian Dan will be coming to Handan within these few days

and this is the only chance for me to take revenge. I will not allow anyone to thwart me.”

The two ladies were visibly moved, obviously they do not know that Tian Dan is coming to Zhao. Tian Rou’s eyes opened widely as she stared at him, “Aren’t you with Zhao Mu?”

Xiang Shaolong shouted, “Shut up! Who would be this conniving thief’s partner! I’m just pretending and gaining his trust so that I can deal with Tian Dan. Hai! I’ve never killed women, I’ll have no choice but to start tonight.”

That Uncle Zheng who was outside the door cried out in alarm, “Hero do not be rash, the death of my two Missies’ family were caused by Tian Dan and Zhao Mu. This is absolutely true, if there’s any deceit in this, then may I die without a burial place with thousands of arrows piercing my heart.”

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be deep in thought and said, “There’s no doubt that both of you has a deep enmity with Zhao Mu, but one of them is in Qi while the other is in Zhao, so how did they become your enemies?”

Zhao Zhi cannot control her tears as she cried piteously, “My family was harmed by Tian Dan and forced to escape to Handan but who would have expected that the conniving thief Zhao Mu would actually capture all 183 people in my clan and ordered men to send us back to Tian Dan, where they were all tortured to death by him. Would you believe if I say this?”

Tian Rou said angrily, "Don't beg him."

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "Although there's a 'Rou'⁹ in your name, you're not gentle at all."

Tian Rou was so furious that she couldn't speak.

Xiang Shaolong added, "Why are the three of you left then?"

Uncle Zheng's voice drifted in, "The two Missies and I were late by a few days, that's why we escaped the calamity. For the past seven years, we've been constantly thinking of revenge, Hero, please believe us."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved, and feeling a little guilty that he wanted to kill them earlier. Living in this warring era where lives are cheap, it's really easy to become influenced.

Xiang Shaolong released the trigger and the arrow shot between the two ladies faces with a whoosh, into the wall.

The two ladies were dumbfounded; they did not expect him to shoot at this moment. If the target is any one of them, they certainly won't be able to avoid it.

Xiang Shaolong threw the strong bow aside and kept his sword in the sheath as he said with a smile, "I am not interested in interfering in your matters, but I ask that you do not come and spoil my plans. Your real enemy is Tian Dan and not Zhao Mu and now that Zhao Mu is on the alert. To strike again would only be giving yourselves up for capture. Think about it! Such pretty girls like the both of you, if you

⁹ Rou, meaning gentle

fall into the hands of the evil, you will face a humiliation even worse than death. This is my advice, farewell!”

Under the amazed stare of the both of them, Xiang Shaolong strode towards the door and came face to face with that Uncle Zheng before leaving leisurely.

CHAPTER 7

Glib-Tongued

[Translated by JEAN]

BY the time Xiang Shaolong returned to the guesthouse, it's about two more hours to dawn. After telling Teng Yi what happened, he stretched and yawned.

Teng Yi sighed with admiration, "You've done this beautifully. Zhao Zhi no longer suspects that you are Xiang Shaolong. But from what I see this little lass has no ill intentions towards the real you. She just wants to coerce you to deal with Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "Her intentions are so good that she has to use that strong bow to aim at my back."

Teng Yi replied, "You spoiled that Miss's grand plan of assassination twice and that Tian Rou is so competitive so naturally she'll want to put you down a little."

Xiang Shaolong remembered that he was teasing Zhao Zhi while on the way to the Guo residence, the way she halfheartedly rejected him indeed reflected her interest in him. Now that she has 'mistakenly' think that the person who took advantage of her is 'Dong Kuang' and not 'Xiang Shaolong', how would she feel?

He remembered when she 'realized' that Xiang Shaolong is actually Dong Kuang, the look of disappointment on her face is something that cannot be faked.

Teng Yi said with a smile, "Since you're under imperial orders not to work hard, we don't have to pretend so why don't all of us go and have a good sleep. Who cares what will happen?"

Xiang Shaolong thought that sounded right, so he returned to his bedroom to have a good sleep. By the time Wu Guo came to wake him up, it was already past lunch and the sun is almost setting.

This is the first time in so many days that he's slept so soundly. Wu Guo said, "Second Master is waiting in the hall for Third Master for dinner!"

Xiang Shaolong got up energetically and after washing up went to meet Teng Yi. The two of them had a hearty meal.

Wu Guo said from the side, "Lady Ya sent someone here with a message, asking Third Master to go to her residence tomorrow night for a feast. She will send someone to pick you up and hopes that you will be able to go over to her place earlier."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong remember that she promised Li Yuan a feast last night. At that time he thought that she did not mean it, so he did not expect her to really be serious about it. He said with a wry smile, "Look why we are here in Handan, almost every night I have to go and socialize with those people."

Teng Yi said with a laugh, "It's not difficult to deal with Li Yuan, but dealing with those women is enough to make you suffer."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I really want to give Zhao Ya a good fuck to ease the hatred in my heart but this way she will surely be able to recognize me. Like what you've said, once she uses her nose to sniff, there's no way I can hide. Besides this expert in man is so familiar with my body."

Teng Yi shook his head and said, "I, too, feel sad for your situation... oh!"

His expression changed and he said, "It's not totally hopeless. While I was feeling bored yesterday, I took a walk at the back garden and there is a kind of plant there. If we take the sap out and smear a little on the body, it will emit a

smell very similar to that of a human body. It smells quite good, and a lot more natural than the fragrances women use to suffuse their clothes. This will solve the problem of scent. If there's not special marks on your body like moles or birthmarks, you may be able to make your way through the act if you extinguish the lights and do her in the dark."

Wu Guo who was at the side can't help but interjected, "Third Master's thing is certainly bigger than the average person. Zhao Ya will know once it goes in."

Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong wrapped their arms around their stomachs and bowled over in laughter.

Xiang Shaolong said breathlessly, "You're such a bootlicker. But I was just saying it for fun, not that I really want to do her, nor is it worth taking such a huge risk. Hai! To treat her like an object just to expend my lust is not really very appropriate after all."

Teng Yi tried to control his laughter as he added, "But there's no harm applying a little of the sap of that 'love plant', so there'll be no problem even if you get a little closer with Zhao Ya. I'll go and prepare it immediately."

Wu Guo was dumbfounded, "To think that it has such a nice name."

Ever since Teng Yi had Shan Lan, he became a lot happier and easygoing. He extended his hand to pat his shoulder and sighed, "Now you've learnt something. This kind of love sap has slight aphrodisiac properties and women all like the smell of it. Young men from the villages around Jing Jun's

age all like to apply some on their body when they go on dates with ladies. But it has to be mixed with rice water, otherwise it will cause the whole body to break out in rashes. Do you want to try?"

Wu Guo replied excitedly, "I must find a beauty to test this on once we get back to Xianyang."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Are there any other matters?"

Wu Zhuo answered, "Headmaster Zhao of the Martial Arts School has sent someone over with an invitation, saying that the Sword Meet tomorrow has been postponed to noon the day after and asked that Third Master must attend."

Xiang Shaolong told Teng Yi, "The other conniving devil Li Yuan is too detestable, maybe I will teach him a good lesson."

At this time someone came in to announce, "Lord Longyang is here to see Third Master and is waiting at the outer hall right now."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback and asked Teng Yi with a dry look, "Are there any sap called 'Demon Riddance' to make him run to the other end of earth once he smells it."

Teng Yi guffawed, "This is the first time that I will not envy Third Brother's luck in love!"

On seeing the outstanding horse fanatic Dong Kuang striding out, Lord Longyang stood up gracefully with a pose that 'he' thinks is the most beautiful and even greeted him in the way a lady should greet.

Xiang Shaolong has no idea whether to laugh or cry and was secretly lamenting to himself but he pretended to smile and welcome him, "Lord is showing me such favor by coming here personally."

Lord Longyang's expressive eyes flitted towards him as he replied with a slow smile, "I came today to look for Mister Dong because something is troubling me and I won't feel happy until I say it."

Today he's gone back to dressing as a man but his clothes and accessories are still very colorful. If he's a real woman, Xiang Shaolong would certainly compliment her for her grace but now his heart is palpitating. If the things that he won't feel happy unless he says it are lovey-dovey words, heaven knows how he should deal with that.

After the both of them were seated, Lord Longyang said seriously, "I think that Mister Dong's decision to return to Zhao is really too rash."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, but also secretly relieved as he asked in bewilderment, "Why would you say that?"

Lord Longyang saw that there's no one around so he continued gently, "I admire Mister Dong's talent. That's why I'm speaking my mind with no restraints. The state of Zhao is now like a well that is almost drying up. So no matter how strong Mister is, how perfect and ample is your tools for filling and fixing the well, if you try to protect this well faithfully, ultimately you cannot escape the fate of the well drying and you dying."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. All along he has little regard for this high ranking fellow who got his position from using his male charms to entice the King of Wei but now that he has heard his expressive analogy and how he has illustrated the state of Zhao straight to the point, he can't help but see him in a different light. He pretended to be surprised and said, "The Zhaos have recently gained a huge victory over the Yans, so how can they be a well that's almost drying?"

Lord Longyang said with a smile, "A dying person will have times when there's a surge of energy before they pass on, and the sun is the most beautiful right before dusk. And this is because Zhao still has two famous generals to hold the fort. Once these two are gone, do you think Zhao can produce any elixir to prolong her life?"

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Are you referring to Lian Po and Li Mu?"

Lord Longyang replied, "Exactly these two. Lian Po is getting old, he can still defend but will have problems attacking. Recently there are rumors about his incapability in attacking Yan. King Xiaocheng has all along been suspicious of him. So now there's talk in Handan about changing generals. No one knows if history of exchanging Lian Po with Zhao Gua will repeat itself."

Without giving him time to interrupt, Lord Longyang continued smoothly, "As for Li Mu he is loyal and straightforward but doesn't know how to flatter others and

not glib enough. If he is under an able ruler, he will become a formidable general who can conquer the world. Pity he is under King Xiaocheng, a person who is overly suspicious and only craves stories of success. With the Marquis of Julu at the side navigating his thoughts, he will not come to a good end. A pity that he is not afraid of death and is stoutly loyal, refusing to leave. Otherwise everyone in Great Wei, from the ruler to the officials, will all welcome him with open arms.”

Once he said that Xiang Shaolong knew immediately that the Weis must have made contact with these two famous generals. Li Mu has rejected, but he wondered what is Lian Po’s reply. This Lord Longyang is indeed formidable, if he is able to remove the two huge military pillars of Zhao with just some words, won’t the state of Zhao be under the mercy of the Weis?

Lord Longyang saw that he was engrossed and thought that he has shaken his stand and tried to entice him further by saying, “Mister Dong may be wondering why am I so bold as to criticize the Zhaos in their capital. Firstly I do not hold them in regard at all and I bet they won’t dare to do anything to me. Most importantly I really admire Mister Dong very much and does not wish to see your hard work go down the drain in future, or even ending up as a slave from a defeated country. Besides, the Qins and the Zhaos have deep enmity and will never let them off. A good bird will choose a good tree to nest in. So if Mister is willing to come and work for Great Wei, I guarantee that the houses and

gifts offered will be something that the Zhaos cannot give. At least we won't be chasing Mister away in panic just because of a few words by the lackey of Lord Chunshen, Li Yuan, who has no power at all."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking him formidable, knowing that Lord Longyang has spies around the King of Zhao, that's why he knows how to grab the best opportunity to cut in and persuade him to work for Wei instead.

He can't help but admire his father-in-law, Wu Yingyuan's foresight to give him this horse fanatic identity. Now all the various states place much emphasis on battles on horses and him as Dong Kuang is the dream talent of all the other states.

He pretended to be moved and said, "Your words are indeed thought-provoking. I will consider them carefully and I still have to explain to my clansmen. But for now..."

Lord Longyang saw that he did not reject immediately and looked ecstatic. He cast a flirting look at him and said, "I understand the problems faced by men, Mister Dong need not worry. It's best that you can find out the situation in Zhao, so that you will know that I have not lied."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but admire his skills of persuasion. Just a few words and he has revealed all the problems of Zhao. He sighed in reply, "If I am not a Zhao, I would have agreed immediately."

Lord Longyang said gently, "To King Xiaocheng, other than the Zhao family, who else does he consider a Zhao? If it's not

Zhao Mu or Zhao Ya, anyone else who loses favor like the Wu family, would have been torn to pieces by him long ago. He does not treasure a talent at all and Xiang Shaolong is the best example. If Mister has not given them a thousand high quality warhorses, in less than a year, the Zhaos will not have any useful horses left.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that this person is really vicious. By pulling him away, it's akin to breaking the legs of the Zhaos.

Lord Longyang lowered his voice and said, “I heard that Zhao Ba had acceded to the request of that conceited Li Yuan and will be holding a Sword Exchange Meeting the day after at noon. If Mister will just nod your head, I can order someone to take him down a peg or two on that day. Let's see if he still dares to be so arrogant.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. Every time they talk about Li Yuan, Lord Longyang seems to be very angry. With the looks and build of Li Yuan, it's impossible that Lord Longyang won't take a liking to him. It seems that maybe Li Yuan has once rejected him with harsh words, that's why his love has turned into hatred.

Or maybe he does not like the kind of gentle and pretty faced men like Li Yuan, but likes rough and stout men like him... heh! What are his thoughts leading him to?

Surprisingly, Lord Longyang stood up and said before he left, “Mister, please think it over carefully and let me know once

you have an answer. We'll then discuss the details and I'll make sure Mister will leave happily."

Xiang Shaolong was confused by his terms of address¹⁰ and hurriedly sent him off. He only turned back with a wry smile after seeing him go up the carriage and left under the accompaniment of ten over followers.

No matter what, he will never dare to belittle this she-male.

After Lord Longyang left, Xiang Shaolong enjoyed the free time and took a leisurely walk alone in the garden of the residence, thinking back about the intoxicating time when he snuck in here and first met Zhu Ji.

No matter what kind of a person Zhu Ji is, he can really feel her liking for him, and this is something that cannot be faked.

Suddenly, he felt a little melancholy and lost as well as loneliness. In fact he should feel even more satisfaction than anyone else. As a modern person, to come to this strange yet familiar warring states era, his life is at least an era richer than anyone else from any era.

Because he has experienced one more era.

After spending a few difficult years here, even the way he thinks, the words he uses are now similar to the way of the people in this era.

¹⁰ Lord Longyang was addressing himself as 'I' in 2 ways, interchanging between the position of a Lord (Ben Jun) and the position of a lady (Nu Jia). I just used 'I' because I can't think of any English terms that can indicate 'I' to be spoken by a lady or an official.

Last night, his thoughts of silencing others and to kill the girls, is exactly what Wu Zhuo and Teng Yi would have thought the most appropriate thing to do.

Luckily he turned himself back in time, otherwise he would feel guilty for the rest of his life. Once he thought of this, he can't help but feel a cold relief for himself.

By now it's deep into autumn and the weather is turning cold. The garden is filled with fallen leaves and in the darkening dusk, it gives a feeling of stern desolation.

Sometimes feasts are not that bad. During those senseless socialization and mundane festivities, one can easily numb and forget oneself.

Unconsciously, his thoughts turned strongly to his pretty wives and maids at faraway Qin, thinking of how they are pining for his return everyday and can't help but feel a sense of loss.

He can't help but randomly recited one of Li Bai's poems, "Leaving me, yesterday cannot be asked to stay; Troubling me, today's day is filled with worries."

Applause could be heard from behind.

Xiang Shaolong was startled and turned around suddenly to see Teng Yi accompanied by Ji Yanran who was elaborately dressed up and looking as pretty as the moon, both staring at him with wide open eyes.

A strange gleam flashed past this beauty's eyes as her pretty mouth mumbled and repeated these two verses from the famed ancient poetry.

Xiang Shaolong was embarrassed and went forward to say, "Yanran, how can you hide from other people's eyes by coming here like this to see me?"

Teng Yi replied, "Yanran is now on the way to the Palace to attend the King of Zhao's feast and can't help coming in to visit you when she passed by the guesthouse. She has no intention of hiding from anyone at all. Hei! Those two verses of poetry you recited earlier were excellent. All right! You two have a good talk!"

He then made himself scarce.

Ji Yanran smiled enticingly as she threw herself in his arms and sighed with admiration, "Today Li Yuan showed me the poetry he wrote and Yanran is already very astounded and greatly admires his talent, but compared to the two verses you said earlier, Li Yuan's verses were as uninteresting as a child's toy. Who can make references as captivating as you? Yanran admits defeat."

Xiang Shaolong blushed, luckily Ji Yanran couldn't see it as he hugged her tightly and said, "Don't praise me. This is called beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Ji Yanran trembled as she left his arms, looking intently into his eyes and said, "Heavens! The words you spout at random are always so exciting and unique. I still remember your words 'Absolute power will only result in absolute

disintegration'. This phrase exactly describes the problem of all the states at this time. Even Master Han Fei could not come up with such an extraordinary phrase."

After saying all these she can't help but kiss him passionately, almost melting him.

After they parted, Ji Yanran said in a haze, "Xiang Lang! Compose a poetry for me! I'll add melody to it and make it into a famous song for centuries to come."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing ironically, there's no poems that he can recite from the start to the end, so what can he use to deal with this lady. Besides, using other people's works as his own is like plagiaris. It's all right if he just recites it, but if it really goes down in history, won't he have stolen other people's creative rights first, so he replied with a wry smile, "Everything in this world will fade away like smoke, so what if it becomes famous for centuries?"

Ji Yanran sighed delicately as she collapsed on his body, pouting happily, "Shaolong! You're really the cause of my downfall. What else can Yanran think of tonight besides you? But yet I cannot be with you. I don't care, from tomorrow onwards, you will have to pursue me openly so that I can officially surrender to you. This is one thing that you cannot allow to fade away like smoke."

She continued with a sigh, "Fade away like smoke! How pitiful and yet beautiful it sounds. Only you are capable of suddenly spouting such a natural yet excellent verse."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, for this is making matters worse. If in future she keeps on forcing him to compose poems and verses, won't he become the pirate of the literacy world.

Ji Yanran said sorrowfully, "Yanran has to leave, Mister Zou is waiting for me in the horse carriage. Why not this! Once you've composed a poem, I'll compose the melody and only sing it for you. I know Yanran's husband does not hanker for fame or fortune. Hai! Fame and fortune are indeed troublesome, if no one knows who is Ji Yanran, then I'll be able to be with you all the time."

She smiled slightly and added, "Don't move!"

She kissed him lightly before flitting away, not forgetting to turn back again to smile at him, making Xiang Shaolong totally lose his senses.

When he returned to the inner residence, Teng Yi said, "Only now do I understand why Learned Lady Ji will fall into your hands. Those two verses are really incomparable works, touching the hearts even more so than the 'Book of Poems'. I'm sure you're very familiar with those poems."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that besides the verses 'Elegant and noble ladies, are the pursuit of gentlemen', he knows nothing about the 'Book of Poems', so he can only mumble a reply.

Teng Yi said, "That muddleheaded King Xiaocheng is really hopeless. If you are really the horse fanatic Dong Kuang, you should try to slip away immediately. Look at how much he

fears Li Yuan. His feast for Yanran tonight, he has invited almost everyone with some status, except for you.”

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened, no wonder Lord Longyang left in a hurry, so he was rushing to the Zhao Palace for the feast. He replied with a smile, “It’s rare to have free time like this, why don’t we go and take a walk to the official brothel here and drink to our hearts content.”

Teng Yi said seriously, “Most of the ladies in the official brothels are pitiful girls. Can Third Brother bear to disregard them in the name of fun?”

Xiang Shaolong thought of Su Nu and a sense of guilt washed over him as he said, “Second Brother has reprimanded me rightly!”

Teng Yi nodded his head, “You’re indeed a rare man, to be able to accept another person’s idea so willingly. Come! We’ll just go out for a stroll and sightseeing, that is also another kind of enjoyment.”

The two of them left the residence. After they left the guesthouse, they strolled towards the liveliest area in the city of Handan.

The pedestrians on the roads were few, and it looks a little desolate, a vast difference from before they left Handan.

What happened to the Wu family was a great blow to the Zhaos, and this capital of the Zhaos directly reflected this truth.

The fear the Zhaos have of the Qins is understandable, the massacre of Changping has scared them out of their wits.

Guo Zhong has a huge family and business here, so he cannot just pack up and leave but for ordinary citizens they could not be bothered with that much. They just have to find an excuse to slip out of the city and they will be able to escape to another village or another state.

Such migration is a positive function towards the unification of China, slowly weakening the concept of 'state', which will be beneficial to the aspect of unification.

Now the seven states are fighting for power, and it seems a little like royalty with different surnames struggling for power.

Teng Yi's words startled him from his thoughts as he heard him say, "Someone is following us."

Xiang Shaolong was alert but did not turn around. He asked quietly, "How many people?"

Teng Yi said calmly, "At least seven to eight people, quite highly skilled."

Shaolong thought hard, "I'm afraid it's the people who were watching us outside the residence last night. Who in Handan would do this?"

Teng Yi smiled, "Won't all these be clear if we catch one of them and grill him?"

Xiang Shaolong understood and followed him into a quiet and isolated little lane with trees on both sides and a stone bridge in front. After passing the river, a scattering of houses could be seen on the opposite bank.

Before they could reach the bridge, hurried footsteps were heard from behind and someone shouted, "Dong Kuang, stop!"

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi looked at each other and smiled as they stopped and turned around nonchalantly.

20 odd burly looking swordsmen surrounded them in a fan shape and some went by the back via the woods to circle them, placing them in the center of the circle.

Xiang Shaolong took a clear look and recognized none of them. He had a thought and shouted, "If Li Yuan is that capable he can kill me himself, why did you send nobodies like you to come and die?"

The swordsmen were all alarmed, it seems that Xiang Shaolong was right and he has uncovered their identities.

Before those people had a chance to retort, the two of them took this opportunity while their opponents were still stunned to pull their swords out and attacked. The sounds of swords clanking rang out.

Those people did not expect their opponent to suddenly start the fight without a warning and hurriedly drew out their swords to block the attack.

Xiang Shaolong gave a cold snort as he used all his strength to execute his killer moves. The first of the enemy who reached him had his long sword knocked aside followed by an immediate kick on his stomach and that person screamed as he fell back, curved up like a prawn.

On Teng Yi's side, the crisp sound of metals clanking was heard and the sounds of weapons dropping to the ground and groans rang out, obviously someone has taken a huge beating.

Although Xiang Shaolong's first attack was successful, he did not slow down as all these people are experienced, good fighters and although they lost the advantage of being the first to attack, none of them retreated. Two long swords were aiming towards him from his left and right side as swift as the wind.

Xiang Shaolong continued while he still had the upper hand and moved to the right towards the especially stout looking man and swept his sword across to block. 'Clang!', that stout looking man met his sword head on fiercely without fear.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that it's an excellent fight as he executed the 'Attacking Instead Of Defending' stance from one of the three killer moves in the Mohist addendum as he slashed fiercely towards his opponent's sword. That person is indeed skilled as he moved back and avoided the attack.

The long sword from the left aimed towards his chest.

Xiang Shaolong made a fake move as he avoided his opponent's vicious attack. If he were to release his flying needles now, his enemies will certainly be unable to escape but he must stop such an enticing thought because unless he can kill all his enemies and remove all evidence, otherwise the Zhaos may find out that he's Xiang Shaolong based on this.

Just as this thought was flashing past his mind, a long sword came alarming close towards his back. With a backhand slash of his sword, Xiang Shaolong chopped heavily on the sword near the handle. This person cannot be compared to the earlier stout looking man and Blood Wave chipped off a part of the long sword and the sword fell to the ground as the man lost his grip.

Xiang Shaolong knocked into him hard in order to avoid that stout man's sword attack again and elbowed that person's chest hard.

The sounds of bones cracking were heard as fresh blood spurted from his enemy's nose and mouth as he stumbled, knocking another enemy who was coming up from the side.

'Clang!'

Xiang Shaolong blocked the sword attack from the stout looking man, suddenly stooped down and gave a quick sweep with his leg.

That stout looking man did not expect such a weird move at all and gave out a cry as his legs flew out from under him

and he turned a somersault in the air before falling heavily on the ground.

Right at this time more long swords came attacking again. This group of people are indeed fearless, and it took quite some effort fending them off.

If he did not have Teng Yi with him, then he can't be so sure of winning if he's alone.

There's no need for him to further injure that stout looking man so he executed the defense stance of the Mohist swordplay, forcing the three men at bay.

At this time Teng Yi gave a snort and knocked into his back, obviously he has taken some beating.

Xiang Shaolong took time off to turn around for a look and saw that three of their enemies are already on the ground but there were another five or six charging towards them like rabid tigers, viciously attacking Teng Yi, who shouted "Go into the woods!"

His swept his enemies away with his sword and just as he gave a flying kick to one of them, another one slashed him on the shoulder. Although it was not a deep wound, but blood still flowed profusely, dyeing his shirt red.

Teng Yi roared as he knocked off the weapon of one of the enemies and his iron fist crushed into that person's face and he fainted immediately.

The danger has lessened slightly as the both of them fought a bloody path out into the woods.

Those people had fear struck in them after some of their men were killed and no one dared to run after them. They whistled and helped up the injured and ran towards the other side of the bridge.

Teng Yi was about to give chase when Xiang Shaolong pulled him back and said with a smile, "Let them leave! Even if we catch them it'll be a wasted effort, for in the end won't we still be unable to touch Li Yuan?"

Teng Yi exclaimed, "You're injured!"

Xiang Shaolong took a look at the wound on his left thigh as well and said with a smile, "Just a little more serious than yours, it's nothing! But this batch of swordsmen are indeed formidable, no wonder Li Yuan is so arrogant."

Teng Yi chortled, "We really think too lightly of our enemies."

Xiang Shaolong wrapped his arms around his shoulder as both of them went back laughing and joking. But in his heart he was thinking of how terrible Li Yuan's expression would be when he see his men coming back injured.

CHAPTER 8
Affections Of A Pretty Girl
[Translated by JEAN]

AFTER Xiang Shaolong bandaged the wound on his shoulder, he might as well not wear his top and just wrapped a cape around and started practicing his writing on the table in the study.

Coming to this era, the first thing he has to overcome is the language, the accent and the way they habitually speak and the terms used. Either because he is especially talented, or maybe because he has no other choice, but he was able to handle such things within about half a year.

But as for writing? Until now, which has already been a few years, his words is still illegible. The ancient calligraphy of this era is really baffling him, and the problem is compounded by having to write on bamboo slips or cloth.

Luckily he regarded practicing calligraphy as an interest and since there's no Wu Tingfang or anyone else harassing him, he can take the opportunity of this free time to practice.

Just as he was totally immersed in the world of brush and ink, Wu Guo came in to report, "Miss Zhao Zhi is looking for Third master."

Xiang Shaolong guessed long ago that she will look for him so he replied, "Let her come in!"

Wu Guo's gaze landed on his table filled with his crooked and clumsy words, which looked like a child's handwriting and asked hesitantly, "Do you want me to help you tidy up the things here first before asking her in."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is seriously trying to remind him tactfully that others must never see this splendid handwriting of his so he said with a laugh, "I deliberately wrote it so awfully so that others will know that Dong Kuang is unrefined. My real handwriting is extremely outstanding and you'll surely compliment them once you see it!"

Wu Guo slapped his forehead and said, "Third Master really thinks things thoroughly, otherwise even those who has never held a brush won't have their words end up looking like this."

He hesitated, "But is Third Master being a little too exaggerated?"

Xiang Shaolong was extremely flummoxed for this Wu Guo is indeed being quite funny and he reprimanded him with a laugh, "Go and invite the lady in quickly! It's not nice to make people wait that long."

Wu Guo knows that he is an easygoing person who never puts on airs and treats everyone well regardless of rank, and he is already used to joking around with him so he bowed and left after hearing that.

In a short while Wu Guo led Zhao Zhi and came up behind him. Xiang Shaolong's back is still facing the door, as he looked at the garden outside the window illuminated by the moon. He instructed Wu Guo to leave and close the door behind him before telling Zhao Zhi, "Come! Sit opposite me."

He concentrated on his writing while Zhao Zhi went to the other side of his table and sat down delicately, her pair of pretty eyes landed on his snaky and crooked words and exclaimed "Ah!"

Xiang Shaolong waved his brush with a smile, "That's just how an unrefined person's handwriting looks like! Hope Miss Zhao won't find it a joke. Oh! I should be addressing you as Miss Tian instead."

Zhao Zhi lowered her pretty face, not really daring to look at him directly yet she rolled her eyes at him in rebuke as she said, "You're really muddleheaded, who said my family name is Tian?"

Xiang Shaolong was astounded, "Didn't you tell me so yourself? Why have you forgotten about it so fast. Don't be forgetting about me tomorrow as well!"

Zhao Zhi narrowed her eyes at him before lifting up the brush and wrote a word 'Shan', the character delicate and straight, a great world of difference when compared to the characters that Xiang Shaolong has written.

Xiang Shaolong said with embarrassment, "So it was I who have heard wrongly! But something came out of this mistake as well."

Suddenly his body shook, as if he suddenly remembered something important.

Zhao Zhi mistook his meaning and said sadly, "You finally realize that my Father is the philosopher Shan Qin from the state of Qi. He wholeheartedly wanted to help his Majesty run the country well, but that conniving thief Tian Dan thought that Father wanted to reduce his power so he just randomly made up some proof of rebellion, causing our whole family to escape to Handan in the middle of the night. We thought that Zhao Mu would take us in on account of our longstanding friendship, but who would have known..."

But what Xiang Shaolong thought of was Shan Lan, who is married to Teng Yi. Naturally Teng Yi will know about her background clearly and there's no need for him to ask Zhao Zhi directly in case he leaked out the secret.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "What is Zhao Ba's relationship with you?"

Zhao Zhi wiped away the tears from the corner of her eyes and replied, “None at all, it’s just that he is Uncle Zhao Zheng’s good friend. Uncle Zhao Zheng used to be a scholar of Zhao. When he was young he followed his mother and came to our house as a servant, and until now he still regards himself as one. If he had not taken my sister and me in, I don’t know what our outcome would be. I’ve long regarded him as my father, so please still treat me as Zhao Zhi.”

Xiang Shaolong might as well continue his questioning so he asked, “Why did Miss help Zhao Mu train his dance courtesans?”

Zhao Zhi replied, “My Teacher has a deep friendship with Guo Zhong and Guo Zhong wants to find someone to teach his dance courtesans the sword dance, so Teacher recommended me. Zhao Mu saw that I did quite a good job teaching so he wanted me to train the dance courtesans in his residence as well. We thought that it’ll be a good chance for revenge, but once again you saved him.”

Xiang Shaolong asked, “Your elder sister is very highly skilled, did Zhao Ba coach her?”

Zhao Zhi shook her head, “Ever since young, Elder Sister has been the closed door disciple of Grand Master Cao Qiudao, who is also known as Sword Saint but gave himself the name of Mister Wang You¹¹. I stayed behind with Uncle Zheng while she snuck back to Qi to train under Master Cao. She

¹¹ Wang You = meaning forgetting sorrows

tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Tian Dan twice and was forced to hide here recently. Now that Tian Dan has come to Zhao, it is indeed Heaven's gift of a splendid opportunity."

Xiang Shaolong asked in bewilderment, "Why is Miss so cooperative this time, answering all my questions with nothing held back at all?"

Zhao Zhi's pretty face turned slightly red as she replied, "Because I'm grateful to you. You actually repaid malice with kindness, you're really a good person!"

Xiang Shaolong laughed as he leaned back against the chair and stretched lazily, immediately revealing his muscular and solid chest muscles as well as the bandages around his shoulder.

Zhao Zhi exclaimed in alarm, "You're injured!"

Then she turned her head away and blushed, "You don't like to wear clothes at home?"

Xiang Shaolong replied nonchalantly, "Miss is unaccustomed to facing an unrefined person like me!"

Zhao Zhi turned her head back as if she has set her mind on something and looked at him shyly as she replied, "No! Mister's intellect and skills are way better than others. My sister and I are both very impressed by you."

Xiang Shaolong guffawed, "Don't speak on your sister's behalf. I don't believe she will ever be impressed by anyone."

Zhao Zhi revealed a look of surprise as she nodded her head, "You're really good to be able to see through her character. Indeed she did not say she was impressed with you, but I know that in her heart she is now looking at you from a different light. It's just that she's being stubborn and refuses to admit it! She did not object to me coming to look for you as well."

Xiang Shaolong was puzzled, "Don't you have to accompany your Master to attend the King of Zhao's feast? Why do you still have time to come and look for me?"

Zhao Zhi replied, "Precisely because everyone has gone to the Palace, that's why I sneaked here. That Ji Yanran's allure is really formidable. Everyone is falling head over heels over her. If she is willing to play a tune or sing a song, I think that'll be a greater knockout."

Xiang Shaolong was thinking of the good show that is being played right now at the Palace, secretly thinking that if this unrefined man were to woo her publicly and in fact succeed, definitely everyone's spectacles will fall off their noses, if spectacles were to exist in this ancient era in the first place.

Zhao Zhi saw him smiling strangely and can't help but ask, "What are you thinking about? Hey! Why were you not included in tonight's feast? I still have not asked you what is the great enmity between you and Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong waved his hands and smiled wryly, "Which of your questions do you want me reply first?"

Zhao Zhi's eyes landed in his gleaming chest muscles uncontrollably again and she hurriedly averted her eyes in shock as she said with a sigh, "You're like a mystery, so unfathomable that one can never guess your intentions. But if you are Xiang Shaolong, everything would seem reasonable."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I know who Xiang Shaolong is now. Just that I did not expect Miss Zhi is also his woman. This person is really a womanizer."

Zhao Zhi's pretty face turned even redder as she rolled her eyes at him and said, "Not only do I not have a relationship with him, he was initially my enemy as well. Hai!"

Xiang Shaolong asked in bewilderment, "Why did Miss Zhi sigh?"

Zhao Zhi replied honestly, "I don't know either, I just feel a little vexed."

Xiang Shaolong said nonchalantly, "Since you are not his woman, then don't think about him. Since that I have already hugged and kissed you, why don't Miss Zhi just follow me!"

Zhao Zhi was astounded, then her whole face immediately burned as she exclaimed 'Ah!' and shook her head violently, saying, "No! No! Ai! Sorry!"

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, "I am unrefined and does not know how to flatter women. Initially I thought that Miss Zhi was interested in me, but it turned out to be a

misunderstanding. There's nothing to be sorry about, forget it if you do not want to be with me."

Zhao Zhi lowered her head, her expression a little uneasy as she pulled on the corners of her clothes and asked quietly, "You're really not angry with me over this?"

Xiang Shaolong chortled, "Damn! How can I be such a person. But since you're not my woman, which means you're an outsider. My Father taught me that I must never tell the truth to an outsider, so you can forget about me telling you anything."

Zhao Zhi was thoroughly confused by him so she exclaimed with helpless anger, "Forget it if you don't want to tell me! I'm leaving."

Xiang Shaolong once again lifted his brush to write and replied absentmindedly, "Miss Zhi, please! I won't send you off!"

Zhao Zhi seems to be rooted to the spot and looked at him with interest, "You're angry!"

Xiang Shaolong deliberately refused to look at her, "Is there cause for celebration after being rejected by a woman? If Miss Zhi still refuses to leave, maybe I will forcefully cart you off to the bedroom, by then you will have no choice even if you're unwilling."

Zhao Zhi stood up in fright as she pouted, "You! How can you be so unreasonable. I came here meekly to apologize and discuss things with you. Yet, this is how you treat others."

Xiang Shaolong's brush stopped moving as he lifted his head to look at this beauty who is prettier than a flower and eyed her up and down with narrowed eyes, and saying, "I am a normal man. You're a woman so sweet that juice is oozing out. this is a quiet room where there's no one else, so tell me how should I be treating you?"

Zhao Zhi could not tolerate the look in his eyes and fumed, "If you continue like this. I'm really going to leave!"

Xiang Shaolong put his brush down and smiled, "I understand Miss's intentions now. No wonder people say that no matter how willing a woman is in her heart, her mouth will always say no."

Zhao Zhi left her seat in shock and moved next to the door before saying with a sigh of relief, "If you continue treating me like this, Zhao Zhi will hate you to the core."

Xiang Shaolong turned around and said suavely, "Hate is love, hmm! Who was the one who taught me this famous saying? I did not expect that I, Dong Kuang, would finally succeed. Hai! I couldn't even find a woman to hate me in the past."

Zhao Zhi pouted, "Other than horses, what else do you know?"

Xiang Shaolong collected his thoughts and mulled over it before answering, "Actually I have no interest in anything else other than horses. But after hugging Miss that night, I realized that a woman's body is so soft and alluring, heh!"

Zhao Zhi finally could take it no longer and stamped her feet angrily before saying furiously, "I hate you to the core!" before pushing the door and escaping.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the closing door and sighed.

He deliberately made Zhao Zhi angry and leave, otherwise she may find out his secret. Especially when Jing Jun comes back, this lad will surely let the cat out of the bag when he sees her.

Even if there's nothing wrong with Jing Jun's expression, but Zhao Zhi has seen him many times and it'll be easy for her to tell that he is just wearing a mask as his build and movements will reveal the loopholes.

She is not like Tian Zhen, whose only wish is to be with him. If her sister ask her to make use of feelings to threaten him in order to accomplish their dream, that would be terrible.

But if the two sisters were to risk assassinating Tian Dan, it would also be a cause for headache. However, for the time being, he can't think of any plans that can fulfill both ends.

Once he thought about this, he stood up to look for Teng Yi to find out the relationship between Shan Lan and them.

When Xiang Shaolong woke up the next day, he's still very free. He was secretly finding this ironic. From being a popular person who was all the rage, he has now become an idle man and disregarded. He did not expect Li Yuan to have such influence. If he is the real Dong Kuang, it'll be strange if he is not harboring thoughts of leaving by now.

After he spoke to Teng Yi, he has indeed confirmed that Shan Lan is Zhao Zhi's 2nd sister. The Qis saw that she was pretty so she was kept in the official brothel and given training there so that she can be given away as a gift.

After lunch, Zhao Mu was on the way to the Palace to see King Xiaocheng and came into the guesthouse to see them.

In the quiet inner hall, Xiang Shaolong told him about the ambush. Zhao Mu was silent for a moment before saying, "It must be Li Yuan who ordered this. There's no reason for anyone else to deal with you."

Xiang Shaolong had already guessed this is the case, but he just wants Zhao Mu to say it out himself.

Zhao Mu continued, "Li Yuan is head over heels over Ji Yanran and it was even worse when Learned Lady Ji was seated at the same table with you the other day and both of you were conversing pleasantly. That stirred up his jealousy and he deliberately pressured King Xiaocheng to cast you aside. This matter concerns the relations between the two states, and it had to happen at such a critical time so it's difficult for me to put in my views. Hai! Learned Lady Ji came to look for you again yesterday. Don't talk about Li Yuan being overly jealous, but all the men in Handan who thinks that they are qualified to pursue her are all green-eyed as well."

He sighed again and said, "This beauty is really an excellent treasure. Her song last night, everyone at the feast was

bowled over and that Li Yuan even wept. If one can keep her for himself, tell me what more can a man want?"

Xiang Shaolong remained quiet. Zhao Mu can't help but ask, "Why did she come and look for you yesterday?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to smile wryly and asked, "If I say that she has taken a liking to me, would you believe me?"

Zhao Mu chuckled, "Of course not."

Xiang Shaolong continued dejectedly, "I wish that she came to look for me because she could not control her feelings, but a pity she only came to seek my advice because her horse fell sick."

Zhao Mu was secretly thinking that this sounds more logical and said with relief, "I have to go. Bring more men with you when you go out these few days, don't let Li Yuan have another chance again. Our plan can only proceed after the collaboration between the six states have settled down so don't do anything for now."

Xiang Shaolong accompanied him to the main door.

Zhao Mu appeared to be in a good mood as he said with a laugh, "I wonder if Learned Lady Ji's heart has stirred, she seems especially alluring recently. What I did not expect was that she'd even be willing to attend Lady Ya's feast tonight. Her behavior is extremely different from when she was in Daliang, where she hid herself at home and refused to come out. Now everyone in Handan is rubbing his hands, hoping to

win a beauty back. This is even more appealing than winning a great war.”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, “Then won’t the house be filled to the brim tonight?”

Zhao Mu chuckled, “Filled to the brim? This description is really interesting. The phrases you used may be better than Su Qin and Zhang Yi, these two famed debaters. Those words you said the other day forced Li Yuan to become speechless and everyone changed their opinion of you. Even that slutty Zhao Ya’s heart was stirred. Just put in a little more effort and you may even be able to go straight to her bedroom tonight? Hei! The allure of this slut on the bed is something you will know only after you try it.”

Xiang Shaolong felt like covering his ears so that he did not have to listen. Luckily by now they have reached the square outside the main building, only to see more than a hundred of the Marquis Residence’s house warriors, and it was the first time Pu Bu and the rest appeared there as well.

Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, “One day I will capture that female assassin and when the time comes, I’ll make sure that living will be worse than death for her. This group of people are the personal guards I recently transferred over and are absolutely loyal but if they fail in their jobs, I will sentence all of them to death like the last batch of idiots.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, for this person’s cruel nature makes one turn cold. Everyone, including himself, is just a tool that he can discard at will. If he becomes the

ruler, the officials and the people will be in for a lot of suffering.

But this time, this is to his advantage. At least it allows Pu Bu and his men to be closer to him.

Shortly after Zhao Mu left, the horse carriage Lady Ya sent to pick him up arrived, and the person who drove it is Zhao Da.

He trust Zhao Da even more than he trusts Pu Bu and his men so he invited him into the hall and asked with a smile, "Zhao Da, don't you recognize me anymore?"

Zhao Da was astounded and looked towards him, exclaiming hoarsely, "Master Xiang!" before hurriedly kneeling down.

The two of them felt like they've been parted for a long time Zhao Da was so overcome by emotions that he was weeping as he said, "We have been waiting for Master Xiang to return and actually wanted to slip away to Xianyang to look for you but we can't bear to leave Lady behind."

After Xiang Shaolong made him sit down, he said, "This time, my identity must not be revealed, otherwise it will bring everyone down, therefore you must hide this even from your brothers."

Zhao Da replied, "Master Xiang, do not worry. Even if I am to be chopped to pieces, I will never reveal anything about you. Master Xiang trusts me so much..."

When he said this, his eyes turned red and he could not continue his words.

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Once this matter is accomplished, all of you will come back with me to Xianyang! Handan is not a place for you to stay too long in."

Zhao Da was initially overjoyed but his expression immediately dimmed a little as he suddenly knelt down as if he has made up his mind on something and choked, "Master Xiang, please forgive Lady! You're the only one who has a place in her heart even now, she..."

Xiang Shaolong helped him up and was visibly moved as he said, "I understand your loyalty, but many things cannot be forced, let's just see how things progress! That's right! Did Han Chuang spend the night at Lady's place these few days?"

Zhao Da's expression started to look a little unnatural as he replied, "Lady did not see Marquis Han recently, but Mister Li Yuan from Chu did come once and Lady invited him to her building for a talk and he stayed there for more than two hours. Master Xiang! Lady is doing this only because she's trying to make use of others to forget about you, all this time we've never seen her smile truly."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly livid. Li Yuan is not interested in Zhao Ya at all but just making use of her to take revenge on Ji Yanran for treating him differently from others and this Zhao Ya has no self-respect for herself as well.

Zhao Da exclaimed in panic, "Master Xiang! I am telling the truth."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a straight face, "It's very dangerous to try and stand on two boats at the same time. Zhao Da, from today onwards, you better put your whole heart and mind into following me. Zhao Ya is fickle and I cannot put everyone's lives in her hands. If she betrays us again, this time there's no chance of us turning things around again."

Zhao Da was so startled that he knelt down and begged for forgiveness.

Xiang Shaolong pulled him up again and after talking and advising him, he went over to Teng Yi's room to apply the medicinal sap from the 'Love Plant' before following Zhao Da back to Lady Ya's residence.

Along the way, he felt more hatred the more he thought things over. Now, besides Zhao Mu, the person he hates most is that despicable and venomous Li Yuan.

He can't help but blame Zhao Ya for being a born slut again and for having weak willpower. Since she has expressed her interest in this horse fanatic, how can she continuously flirt with other men and he can't help but put his guard up against her.

The best way to deal with those two people, is naturally through his goddess Ji Yanran. Once he thought of this, his whole being was filled with energy.

CHAPTER 9

Despicable Fiend

[Translated by JEAN]

XIANG SHAOLONG arrived at Zhao Ya's main hall, which he first came when newly arrived. Those decorations and trinkets were still placed on the shelves like before, but his state of mind has changed totally.

Why didn't she invite him to that quiet and elegant little building at the garden, allowing Li Yuan that favor but treating him so shabbily. If that's the case she might as well not ask him to come so early.

Character aside, Li Yuan is indeed the dream man in a woman's bedchamber and even Ji Yanran was once impressed by his poetic skills. A pity he is of such character.

Just as he was deep in thought, Lady Ya arrived. Her ladies-in-waiting took their leave after paying their respects.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly wondering why Xiao Zhao and the rest of the maids were missing. Lady Ya came to sit down next to him and said, "Mister Dong is so nice to agree to come earlier, your presence brings glamour to my humble abode."

Xiang Shaolong looked towards her. This mature beauty is glowing, a look of flirtatiousness between her eyes, her body soft and dainty and extremely alluring.

The more beautiful and enchanting she is, the angrier he felt, guessing that she must have enjoyed Li Yuan's care, that's why she has returned to her flirtatious behavior.

He said roughly, "Lady's residence is even better than the residences of those Princes and Marquis, so how can I bring more glamour."

Zhao Ya's dainty brows frowned on hearing this. How can there be anyone who takes such polite talk to be the truth and although she felt a little displeased she did not flare up so easily like she did in the past. Of course this is because right now her heart is still filled with Li Yuan's loving so she did not take it to heart as she replied, "How is the progress of your farm at the Hidden Army Valley?"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback. An astute person like him, on seeing Zhao ya's mannerisms, already knows that Li Yuan has successfully obtained her heart, to the point that she has temporarily forgotten about 'Xiang Shaolong'. That's why she has regained her lost sophistication.

This should be something worth being happy about, at least Zhao Ya won't be harassing him now that her heart is with someone else. However, he still feels very unpleasant, and wants to hurt her and see her upset.

He suppressed this urge and asked with a smile, "Let's not talk about business today. Why does Lady want me to come earlier?"

This time it was Zhao Ya's turn to become speechless.

Of course she's doing this because she has a slight interest in this horse fanatic. But right now Li Yuan has suddenly barged into the picture and taken her heart, at least for now, so she no longer has the earlier feelings of lust.

She sent someone to pick up Xiang Shaolong earlier because deep in her heart she thirsts to be with him. This Dong Kuang has an unusual aura of being rough and at the same time filled with philosophical thoughts, overbearing yet gentle and when combined, gave her a refreshing yet exciting feel. When with him, she never knows what he will say next or if he will do anything surprising. And his attitude towards her blows hot and cold, as if he doesn't care about her but yet as if he is very interested in her. In short, with him around, she has no time to think of anything else.

This is a feeling that Li Yuan is unable to give her.

While she was enjoying herself with Li Yuan, she can't help but pretend that he is Xiang Shaolong but with this unrefined man who bears a little resemblance to Xiang Shaolong, can make her forget everything instead.

What would it be like to be intimate with him?

Once she thought of this, she shocked even herself and secretly reprimanded herself. Why is it that after seeing him, her original strong memory of Li Yuan immediately faded?

Xiang Shaolong saw her hesitant look and his fury soared and he stood up immediately. Zhao Ya was startled and lifted her head to look at him quizzically.

Xiang Shaolong said in a serious tone, "Has Lady fallen for that fellow Li Yuan, that's why you've become so cold towards me?"

Zhao ya's delicate body trembled as she exclaimed, "Ah! No!" By now she cannot guess at all how the other person managed to say out what is in her heart so accurately.

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "That's all right, but if what Li Yuan stole was my precious horse, then I will never let him off."

He stretched lazily and with a laugh, said, "I better take a walk around the streets. I'll come back later to join in the feast so that we need not sit in awkward silence wondering what we should talk about."

Zhao Ya was totally lost as she stood up and pouted, "Mister Dong! Can't you show me some consideration? Am I incomparable to a horse in your mind?"

Once she said that, she knows she has made a Freudian slip because won't that mean that she is regarding herself as his horse?

Xiang Shaolong looked at her nonchalantly but was secretly gloating. He turned around and started walking towards the door and said offhandedly, "That fellow kept pitting himself against me. Fine! Then let me do something and snatch Ji Yanran over, that will give him a taste of having his beloved taken by others."

Zhao Ya wanted to run after him but stopped when she heard the three words Ji Yanran.

But she dare not laugh at him, because his words revealed a great confidence, making one feel that once he says something, he'll definitely accomplish it.

By the time Xiang Shaolong disappeared outside the door, she was still thinking about the four words 'beloved taken by others'.

Hai! The fresh and interesting terms he used can be comparable to Xiang Shaolong. Suddenly, she knows why Li Yuan still cannot totally replace Xiang Shaolong.

Once she thought of this, her mood dimmed and she refuses to think further.

Walking alone at the streets of Handan, Xiang Shaolong thought of the wars that will occur after Xiao Pan ascend the throne and can't help but feel melancholy.

This vast land, after hundreds of years of war has finally come to a point in history that they must rejoin after being separated for so long and him as an 'outsider' had a hand in this change. If he did not come here, does it mean all these would not have happened? No matter how intelligent he is compared to others, this is one question that can give him a headache just thinking about it.

"Brother Dong!" He heard the call and was first at a loss for he momentarily forgot that he is supposed to be Dong Kuang. He turned around after recollecting his thoughts.

It turned out to be the Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang with seven to eight personal guards whom one can tell at a glance that they are highly skilled. All of them looked energetic and were stoutly built. Although they were not as tall as Xiang Shaolong, they still looked imposing.

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed in surprise, "I thought I was the only one who loves a stroll, I did not expect Marquis of Pingshan to enjoy this too."

Han Chuang's expression was serious and he did not reply immediately. Only when he came up next to him did he grab his arm warmly and said as they walked along, "Come! My guesthouse is just around the corner, we'll speak at my place."

Xiang Shaolong was surprised by the sudden warmth for he did not expect his attitude to suddenly turn 180 degrees from his original frosty behavior.

He can't help but follow him back to the guesthouse and even after he sat down in the hall, the ten over swordsmen still stood around them and did not leave, making the atmosphere extremely serious. It seems like secret society bosses out for negotiation.

Han Chuang dispensed with the usual polite talk or serving drinks and said solemnly, "Damn that Li Yuan, not giving both of us any face at all. He publicly shaved off my eyebrow, how extremely hateful."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood. So he has been sending people to keep an eye on Zhao Ya and saw that Li Yuan has gone to look for her and stayed for a length of time which is sufficient for them to do a lot of things before leaving. He was therefore livid and is now regarding him, the other love rival, to be on his side as well. However, it can be said that Han Chuang felt that regardless of looks, status or power, he surpasses Xiang Shaolong so he does not regard him as a strong foe but as for Li Yuan, it's another matter.

From this he can see that Han Chuang is serious about Zhao Ya, to the extent that he'll like to bring her back to Han so that he can enjoy her freely at home. But his dream is shattered by Li Yuan.

He could not find anything to say in response in such short notice. Han Chuang's eyes gleamed fiercely as he said, "Why is it that Brother Dong slipped out so quickly?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he must be on his way to look for Zhao Ya to ask for an explanation when he saw him walking out, therefore he changed his mind and went after him to drag him home.

He gave a cold snort and said, "What I cannot stand the most is being treated coldly and rudely. If I don't leave, what else can I do there, damn his grandmother!"

Han Chuang shared the same thoughts and snorted, "I, the Marquis of Pingshan, has seen many people in my life but I've never seen such a conceited fellow. Who does he think he is? It's all because of his sister's connection. I really don't understand why Lord Chunshen thinks so highly of him. If Li Yanyan can't give birth to a son, let's see how smug he can be."

Until now Xiang Shaolong has no idea why he was pulled here. A person like him with such a high status, there's really no need for him to find someone like him just to pour out his complaints.

Han Chuang's expression looks clouded as he said angrily, "In order not to offend the Chus and affect the grand plan for cooperation, I am already controlling myself not to fight with him over Learned Lady Ji, but he won't even let off Zhao Ya. No wonder ever since he came, that slut Zhao Ya started ignoring me."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand how deeply Han Chuang is mesmerized by Zhao Ya so he sighed, "There are many beauties in the world, why don't Marquis just ignore her. That's why I prefer rearing horses. If you treat a horse well, they will treat you well without any other thoughts, unlike women and conniving people who are hard to keep."

Han Chuang was silent for a moment before he actually laughed and slapped his shoulder, saying, "It's really interested talking to you, but I must get back at him. Li Yuan was such a brag, I'd like to see how formidable his sword skills are."

Xiang Shaolong was startled and exclaimed, "Marquis, you're not thinking of personally dueling tomorrow?"

The corners of Han Chuang's lips curved up into a sinister smile, his eyes turning icy as he lowered his voice and said, "Why would I do such a silly thing. I've already made preparations, even if Li Yuan is taught a lesson, he won't be able to know that I was behind it."

Xiang Shaolong knows that people like him who use underhand methods will never reveal all the details, and seeing that he is willing to tell what his plans are, it's obvious that he's already regarding him as one of them. He pretended to pander to him and said, "People who offend you are really fools."

Han Chuang suddenly leaned back against the chair and said feebly, "We have long given up on the Chus. All along, the three of us have been fighting hard against Qin and they are

always tripping us up from the back. Who can guarantee that Li Yuan won't inform the Qins of our intention to cooperate and by that time if the Qins decide to strike first, the first to be attacked will be my country. Hai! I really do not understand why the King of Zhao would pander to him so much?"

He looked at him and asked, "Does Brother Dong know why King Xiaocheng has suddenly become so cold towards you and did not even invite you to the feast last night?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to look angry and nodded his head, "Isn't it all because of that fellow Li Yuan!"

Han Chuang actually slapped his back like they're old friends and said, "If this place is not for you, there will always be other places who will welcome you. Our doors will always be opened to welcome Mister Dong. If you want to deal with Li Yuan, I can be your back-up."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing, for this is his aim in trying to pull him to his side, which is to make use of him to deal with Li Yuan. He pretended to be grateful and said, "I will remember Marquis's words."

Han Chuang sulked, "I think Yanran will ultimately fall into his hands. If we can snatch this beauty from his hands, it will make him feel even worse than killing him."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Learned Lady Ji is not that easy to win, I don't think that Li Yuan will succeed."

Han Chuang smiled sinisterly, "If you want to make a woman yield, there are a lot of ways. For example letting her try a little aphrodisiac, that will make sure she throws herself at you. It's definitely not easy to find a chance to be along with Ji Yanran but she seems to be impressed with Brother Dong's skills with rearing horses, so maybe... heh! Do you understand my meaning!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly livid, thinking that he is really despicable for this would not only harm Ji Yanran but also himself. Of course! That is only if he is the real Dong Kuang.

A learned lady like Ji Yanran who has the respect and admiration of everyone in the world, if anyone were to do such a beastly thing to her, then won't he end up being the enemy of everyone? It'll be a surprise if Han Chuang is willing to take him in at that time.

Just looking at the plan of making use of him to kill others, he can see how evil hearted this Han Chuang is.

Now he's beginning to understand why the six states will ultimately be destroyed by Qin. With a person like Han Chuang in an important official position, representing his country to come to Handan to have the secret discussion to deal with Qin, instead of tending to business, he is spending his efforts on his jealousy.

For now he has seen that the four states Han, Wei, Zhao and Chu are all filled with manipulative people and cannot be used by great men like Li Mu, Lian Po and Lord Xinling. He wonders how the situation is like in Yan and Qi.

Han Chuang gave a hand signal and someone immediately sent in a small bottle. Han Chuang stuffed it into Xiang Shaolong's hands and said with the most sincere expression, "I am counting on Mister to help me get my back at him. Women are very strange, no matter how fiercely they protect their chastity, but once you get her body, most will become very meek towards you. Ji Yanran is a woman so she is no exception either! Heh! I'm really envious of Brother Dong!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing but he asked about the instructions to use the thing and stuffed the small bottle into his clothes and said, "I still have to see what the situation is like. Hai! I'm really not that interested in women. How can women be compared to horses?"

Han Chuang persuaded him again and after saying a lot of good words, went with him to Lady Ya's residence for the feast.

Xiang Shaolong waited for Han Chuang to enter the residence first. He strolled outside for a while and strutted into the residence slightly later.

The square outside the main building was filled with carriages. After Zhao Da brought him into the residence, he said quietly, "After you left just now, Lady sat there looking very miserable for a long time. She even refused to see Guo Kai when he came. Master Dong is indeed good."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he still has not given up hope that he will reconcile with Zhao Ya but how can spilt milk be recollected.

The feast is being held at an elegant looking square room in the side of the main building. The layout is the same as what the Guo family used the other night, a huge round table placed at the center of the hall with more than ten seats around it.

All those who attended the feast at the Guo family were here, including that pretty Miss Guo.

Xiang Shaolong thought that after that night, Guo Xiu'er would refuse to see Li Yuan but now it seems that she's behaving as if nothing is wrong.

Besides these people, there are four more persons.

The first is of course Ji Yanran, as well as Zhao Zhi and Guo Kai and a 40 old year old man who was dressed splendidly with an imposing aura. However his eyes kept flitting around, giving one the feeling that he is someone who likes to plot.

It was not yet time to start the feast so the eight folding doors at the side of the hall were all opened and they could all see the huge garden outside filled with flowers and trees, with a dozen odd lanterns hanging from the branches, illuminating the whole garden into a colorful array, giving it a dreamy feel.

Xiang Shaolong was the last guest to arrive and most of the people are already in the garden admiring the lanterns leaving only Zhao Mu, Guo Zhong, Le Cheng, Zhao Ba and that anonymous man talking in the hall.

Zhao Mu saw Xiang Shaolong and chortled, "Why is Mister Dong late, I must punish you later and make you drink up three cups of wine. Come! Meet Mister Ji Zhong."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, so this is the special envoy representing Lord Dongzhou to unify the six states to deal with Qin, and he hurriedly rushed over.

Ji Zhong places a lot of importance on protocol so Xiang Shaolong had to pay his respects according to court customs and after some polite words, Ji Zhong may seem courteous and respectful but it was obvious that he pays no heed at all to someone who rears horses. He turned back to the topic they were discussing earlier, talking about how useless King Zhuangxiang of Qin is to place such importance on Lu Buwei, and about how Qin will definitely suffer from internal strife.

Xiang Shaolong is not in the mood to listen to him at all and after excusing himself, he walked towards the garden. He had just stepped into the garden when three pairs of pretty eyes flitted towards him.

Ji Yanran's pretty eyes can't help but light up on seeing him; Zhao Ya turned her head away after staring at him angrily, obviously still upset; Zhao Zhi has been waiting for his appearance all along and her pretty face beamed as she said

happily, “Mister Dong come quickly, we were just discussing a very interesting question!”

Xiang Shaolong looked over and saw that everyone was gathered around the stone bridge at the center of the garden, a clear stream flowing windingly below it and towards a lotus pond a slight distance away where a strange rock was placed right in the middle and the whole layout looked extremely interesting. From this one can see that besides being a slut, Zhao Ya is also a woman that has aspirations.

Ji Yanran was leaning over the bridge in a relaxed manner while Li Yuan who was next to her was pointing at the various fishes swimming beneath, trying to get into her good books.

Guo Xiu’er and Zhao Zhi were the most familiar, sitting together on a large, smooth rock a short distance away and they looked like they were admiring this pretty garden filled with lanterns. The former is eyeing him right now.

Han Chuang and Guo Kai were accompanying Zhao Ya and standing on the middle of the bridge, behind Ji Yanran and Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong walked towards the stone bridge and first greeted Guo xiu’er and Zhao Zhi. Zhao Zhi forced herself to return the greeting while Guo Xiu’er gave him an additional sweet smile.

Although Xiang Shaolong's heart was stirred, he knows that he must never touch this girl for after all the Wu family and the Guo family are arch enemies.

When he stepped up to the stone bridge, Ji Yanran ignored Li Yuan and turned around, saying with a smile, "Mister Dong! We were just discussing about the meaning of life and death, I wonder what your thoughts on this are?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that this pretty lady loves a discussion, from ruling a country to things like this, whether life has any meaning. And this is an era where everyone is fighting for a chance to speak and where ideologies are expanding like an explosion.

The mood for such idle discussions are mostly found in the noble and scholarly circles, just like Confucius and his peers not too long ago who loved to talk about life and philosophy all day long. A pity that he's not too knowledgeable in this area so although he knows that Ji Yanran is giving him a chance to show off so that he can smoothly start his pursuit of her, there is nothing he could do. He replied with a wry smile, "I'm just an unrefined man, how would I understand such profound ideologies?"

Ji Yanran thought that he was pretending to be modest before expounding his ideas but before she had a chance to reply, Li Yuan interrupted, "A pity that Mister Zou is not here, otherwise he will certainly give a very remarkable view. Heh! Why don't we seek Mister Dong's advice on rearing horses!"

Anyone with a brain would know that he was putting Xiang Shaolong down, implying that besides horses, he knows nothing else. And in this era, rearing horses is considered a lowly occupation so he was deliberately jabbing at Xiang Shaolong's status.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly furious but he was even more worried that he'll press on to ask questions about horses. Although he had crammed some knowledge in this area, his expertise is still very limited. He pretended to be nonchalant and said, "I'm sure you've come out with a conclusion after discussing for so long, why not enlighten me on this."

Guo Kai, the conniving Confucian scholar said, "I still believe in Confucius's words 'if you cannot serve men, how can you serve spirits', so I might as well not think about anything beyond life and death."

Zhao Ya was apparently in high spirits as she laughed, "Scholar Guo is really wily, only knowing how to avoid and refusing to face this most important lesson in life."

Li Yuan said proudly, "Whatever we do, there must be a goal so why do we only choose to ignore the question of our existence. Since heaven has given us precious life, we should burn brightly and warmly just like the colorful lanterns hanging high on the trees. Only then will our lives not be lived in vain."

Xiang Shaolong has to admit that there is some truth and imagination behind this person's words. He looked at the ladies around, Zhao Ya's eyes revealed a look of intoxication,

Ji Yanran was concentrating very hard on his words too while Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu'er paused in their private talk to listen intently.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this doesn't look well so after searching through his mind, he said, "What Brother Li said is just an attitude towards life, but it's not a conclusion about the meaning of life and death."

Guo Kai and Han Chuang both revealed a look of surprise for they did not expect this unrefined man's mind and observation skills would be so intricate.

Li Yuan chortled and said, "Well said Mister Dong, but just like what Zhuang Zi said, 'when man take what is small and try to fill up what is great, they will end up confused and will not achieve their end'. As long as we're being restricted within life and death, we can never find the answer about life and death, just like the snake in summer will not know what is the snow and ice of winter. So the only thing we can do is to have an attitude to achieve something so that we will not waste our short lives.'

He spoke flowingly, melodiously and with such feelings that he really has the charisma of a debater that will stun others into admiration. No wonder even Ji Yanran is looking at him differently. For the moment Xiang Shaolong was speechless.

Li Yuan saw his expression and was secretly laughing. There's no way he will let him off so he pretended to be humble and sought his opinion, "And what is Mister Dong's attitude towards life?"

Of course Xiang Shaolong can randomly find some words to say but if he wants make it sound even more impressively than this person, there's no way he could even if he wanted to.

Han Chuang is now on the same side as him so he helped ease the situation by saying, "Tonight's discussion is really unique and interesting, why don't we pause for now and continue during the feast!"

Zhao Ya said unhappily, "It was such an exciting discussion yet you're in such a hurry to start the feast. Zhao Ya still wants to hear more of Mister Li's excellent theories!"

Ji Yanran said gently, "We haven't given Mister Dong the chance to speak?"

Looking at Ji Yanran's expectant eyes, he remembered his mission to pursue her publicly so how can he make himself look so useless? Just as he was lamenting, he suddenly had an idea and remembered that he once heard of a story in his era, and maybe he can use it to reflect the situation now. He walked to the bridge and came next to Ji Yanran. He first looked deeply into her eyes before revealing his white and perfect teeth to Zhao Ya in a slight smile before he turned around and placed both his hands on the side of the bridge, lifting his head to look at the night sky. The moon up in the sky was pure and bright, round and so far away.

Everyone knows that he has something to say but they have no idea what kind of insight he could give that can be better

than Li Yuan's so they all breathed steadily and quietly, getting ready to concentrate on his words.

The corners of Li Yuan's mouth curved up into a slight sniggering smile.

Ji Yanran closed her beautiful eyes, she is confident that Xiang Shaolong will certainly say something philosophical that will make one contemplate over. To her, nothing is more interesting than contemplating over life's questions and this is also the reason why she became good friends with Zou Yan. She fell in love with Xiang Shaolong because his words are refreshing and exceptional, different from the others.

Xiang Shaolong's hoarse voice said slowly, "A tourist was walking in the desert, when suddenly a pack of hungry wolves appeared behind him, running after him so that they could feast on him."

Everyone was alarmed but at the same time they felt a great interest for they did not expect him to suddenly tell a story. Just like how Zhuang Zi likes to use fables to portray his thoughts.

Xiang Shaolong's voice reverberated through the quiet night, giving it an inexplicable feeling of mystery and power, especially when the topic is about the unfathomable question of life and death.

He continued in a very slow tempo, "He was startled and started running madly, fighting on for his life."

Guo Xiu'er exclaimed 'Ah' and said, "How can he run faster than hungry wolves in the desert, he will certainly die!"

The rest of them smiled on hearing that but did not say anything because they all want to continue listening, even Li Yuan was no exception. But when he saw how pretty Ji Yanran looked with her eyes closed, looking so obedient and concentrated, he can't help but feel jealousy burn in him.

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, "No need to panic! Just as the hungry wolves were about to catch up with him, he saw a well in front which he has no idea how deep it could be and jumped in without a thought."

Zhao Ya heaved a sigh of relief and asked, "The well is certainly filled with water, right?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at the little stream below him and shook his head, "Not only is it dry, there's also a lot of poisonous snakes and on seeing that there's food being delivered right to their door, they all raised their heads and hissed, waiting in anticipation."

This time it was Ji Yanran's turn to exclaim 'ah!' as she opened her pretty eyes and turned her dainty body around to look at him and ask, "What should he do? Why don't he turn back and fight with the hungry wolves for poisonous snakes are more frightening than wolves."

Han Chuang laughed, "Women are all afraid of snakes and Miss Ji is no exception."

Xiang Shaolong looked at Ji Yanran and said gently, "In his panic, he started grabbing around for something that might save his life and unexpectedly, heaven is fulfilling his wish and he grabbed a small tree that was growing horizontally between the well so he was suspended in midair."

Everyone remained quiet for they knew there will be more to the story.

Zhao Ya's eyes lit up for in this instance, her heart only sees this man who is even more special and unfathomable than Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong continued, "Therefore the hungry wolves are above and the poisonous snakes are below. Although that person is in a dire situation where he can neither advance nor retreat but at the moment at least, he is safe."

Everyone started to have some understanding. What Xiang Shaolong said is the reflection of life for when between life and death, who would not be in the situation whereby he cannot advance or retreat?

He continued, "Just as he was heaving a sigh of relief, he heard a strange noise. He turned towards where the noise was coming from in fear and was shocked to see a large number of rats chewing on the roots of the tree with their sharp teeth. This life saving tree has not much time left."

Guo Xiu'er and Zhao Zhi both cried out at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong looked deeply into Ji Yanran's eyes, as if he's telling this story only to her, "Just at this instant between life

and death, he saw in front of his eyes on a leaf, a drop of honey. Therefore he forgot about the hungry wolves above, the poisonous snakes below and the small tree that was almost gnawed in half by the rats but closed his eyes and extended his tongue, totally concentrated on tasting that drop of honey.”

The bridge was so still that there was no noise at all except for the faint rush of the stream flowing past.

Xiang Shaolong stretched lazily and said, “And to me, that drop of honey is the meaning to life!”

No one spoke for even people like Guo Kai and Han Chuang who only knows how to hanker after wealth and fame, had their worries stirred up and they could relate with him.

Li Yuan saw that everyone was touched by Xiang Shaolong’s extremely deep thoughts on this matter and was feeling upset so he broke the silence and asked, “Where did this fable come from?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, “The horses told me!”

He then chortled and said, “I’m hungry!”

CHAPTER 10

A Drop Of Honey

[Translated by JEAN]

JI YANRAN personally lifted the wine flask and stood up, coming to kneel in front of Xiang Shaolong. There's no need for her to pretend, for the look of admiration is naturally revealed in her eyes as she said gently, "Yanran have just heard the most moving fable in my entire life and there's no way I can repay you, except to make use of this fine wine to thank Mister Dong."

With a graceful and breath-stopping pose, she poured the wine into Xiang Shaolong's cup.

Everyone was astounded.

Zhao Mu said in bewilderment, "What kind of fabulous fable did Mister Dong said, to make our Learned Lady Ji bow down and serve him wine personally?"

Ji Zhong revealed a look of surprise.

Li Yuan's face darkened, a look of hatred and jealousy in his eyes that he cannot hide.

Zhao Ya looked intoxicated as she repeated the story.

Those who have not heard were all impressed.

Ji Yanran went back to her seat and lifted her cup, "Ji Yanran offers Mister Dong a toast."

Although Han Chuang is secretly feeling extremely jealous, he was also happy that the hateful Li Yuan has been given a blow so he joined in and said, "Let everyone have a toast!"

Everyone toasted one another and although Li Yuan was extremely unwilling, he had no choice but force himself to drink this bitter wine.

Xiang Shaolong looked closely at the ladies. Ji Yanran obviously cannot hide the overflowing love that he has incited whereas Zhao Ya kept making eyes at him, trying to convey her thoughts with her eyes. Even Zhao Zhi who was still angry with him changed her attitude towards him, sneaking peeks at him frequently. Most surprisingly is that Guo Xiu'er was also looking at him with admiration. He was secretly counting his lucky stars. If not for the fact that he

can make use of other people's intellect, he'll certainly make a fool of himself tonight, and it definitely won't be this outcome, where he stuck four birds with a stone.

Ji Zhong said, "I didn't expect Mister Dong to have heard such impressive and moving fable, this is really incredible."

He turned to Li Yuan and said, "Mister Li has such intelligence, you'll definitely have your views about this."

His words are meant to put down Xiang Shaolong subtly while obviously complimenting Li Yuan and from this one can see that this person will stoop to all means just to achieve his goals. To him, Li Yuan, who can influence the King of Chu, is naturally more important than Xiang Shaolong.

Han Chuang chortled and interrupted, "That was a fable that Mister Dong inferred from the horses, but I do have another view. If everyone in our six states forget ourselves in that drop of honey which can only offer us an instant of sweetness and join forces to deal with the Qins who are like the tigers and wolves, we will definitely be able to extricate ourselves from danger."

These words are obviously meant for the Chus, because time and again they have betrayed the other united states just because the Qins gave them some benefits and in the end they lost their own troops as well.

Zhao Mu and the rest were secretly gloating as they look at Li Yuan's expression change slightly.

With Ji Yanran around, Li Yuan refuses to make himself look bad so he quickly smoothened his expression and changed the topic.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the more one talks, the more likely mistakes are made so he buried himself with food and drinks. He ignored Li Yuan who was trying to get on Ji Yanran's good grace, and once in a while would engage Zhao Ya and the other ladies, behaving like a suave flirt. If not for the fact that he was put down earlier by Xiang Shaolong, he'll definitely be a woman's ideal lover.

However Ji Yanran is not in the mood to bother about him, constantly looking at Xiang Shaolong instead, wishing that she can throw herself into his arms immediately.

The hostess, Zhao Ya, who was seated next to Li Yuan, was forced to down three cups of wine and her pretty face started turning an alluring red. She gave a flirtatious laugh and asked, "Have you not forced enough drinks on me today yet?"

Everyone was startled and looked at the two of them.

Zhao Ya knew that she has let the cat out of the bag and quickly lowered her head.

Li Yuan was feeling extremely embarrassed. He came to look for Zhao Ya secretly today partly because he wanted to put Xiang Shaolong down but the main reason is that he is feeling lusty. Although Zhao Ya does not have Ji Yanran's unique grace, she is still a rare beauty and it's a waste to give

up this chance. He just did not expect Zhao Ya to leak out this information during the feast.

He coughed dryly and said, "Didn't we agree last night we'll have a wager on who can hold their drinks better?"

Zhao Ya took a glance at Xiang Shaolong only to see him staring at the fine wine in his cup, as if he doesn't mind at all. She felt a little relieved but at the same time felt a tinge of regret, hating herself for being unable to withstand Li Yuan's lure.

Besides Xiang Shaolong, Li Yuan is the only man after him who could make her heart flutter and he even said he can take her away from this sad place to go to faraway Chu. But she has no idea why, this horse fanatic with the strange ideas in front of her, the way he moves and speaks, a person with a mixture of intelligence, coarseness and rashness, is make her feel more excitement than the more handsome Li Yuan. She is struggling, caught between the desire to fight back and to give in, feeling both pain and happiness.

Ji Yanran took a look at Xiang Shaolong and told Li Yuan indifferently, "This is what's called, famous men since ancient times have too much love to share!"

Li Yuan was secretly cursing himself and before he had the chance to explain, Zhao Ya lifted her pretty face and said with a smile, "Miss Yanran is mistaken. Mister Li only came to discuss poems with Zhao Ya, and only drank a little wine to liven the mood!"

Obviously Guo Xiu'er has an interest in poetry so she asked Xiang Shaolong, who is now a great philosopher in her heart, "What does Mister Dong think about poems?"

Once she said that, everyone's attention turned towards Xiang Shaolong.

Guo Zhong was secretly feeling alarmed, has his beloved daughter taken a liking to this unrefined man? Zhao Zhi remembered Xiang Shaolong's horrible handwriting and was secretly sighing.

Ji Yanran and Zhao Ya were energized as they waited excitedly for this person to say something marvelous.

The odes passed down since ancient times, after many modifications by Confucius and his disciples, totaled more than 300.

These odes, in this era, have a very practical value, especially amongst the nobility. It has become a part of life and if one cannot recite some odes during social activities, he will be looked down upon. There's even a form of welcome address that uses purely odes that is called 'Composing a Poem' and the poem used in reply is called 'Reply Poem'. Therefore those who are not familiar with odes will embarrass themselves easily, like the saying 'One who does not learn odes, will have no words to reply'.

Xiang Shaolong is considered lucky but his luck has apparently run out by now. He's finally come face to face with this unsolvable problem.

Odes are not only a decorative façade and a tool to express one's upbringing and cultivation but 'discussing odes' is also a popular activity of this era. For example the ode 'Charming smile, enchanting eyes, plain background for colors' can generally mean a beautiful woman but can also mean the application of make-up¹². Zigong therefore asked Confucius and he later added, "A painting will have to be done on a plain white background.' Because of this he gained Confucius's admiration, saying that he is qualified enough to discuss odes.

Therefore, discussion of odes is a very common affair during feasts so Guo Xiu'er was not deliberately making things difficult for this man who has garnered her interest.

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to cry for help but he said calmly, "I am after all an unrefined person, how can I be qualified to talk about insights?"

Guo Xiu'er did not expect this exceptional man to give her such a disappointing answer so she lowered her pretty head and spoke no more.

Ji Yanran had a look of bewilderment.

To her, having Xiang Shaolong woo her openly is a very interesting game for it can allow her to understand more about her beloved ability. She did not expect him to reveal his sharp wit only to shrink back again, and now she cannot admire his talent. She did not expect Xiang Shaolong to be even worse than a simpleton in this aspect.

¹² Ode from the analects of Confucius

Ji Zhong revealed a look of despise and he is even surer that Xiang Shaolong must have stolen the fable earlier from someone else and used it as his own.

Guo Kai and Han Chuang revealed a look of surprise, for Dong Kuang's father and grandfather used to be court officials, so how can Dong Kuang know nothing about poems at all? Whereas Zhao Mu guessed that he did not want to show off under such circumstances so he chortled and asked Zhao Ya, "I wonder what is the topic that Mister Li and Lady discussed today?"

Li Yuan saw that Xiang Shaolong had been embarrassed and was secretly ecstatic as he replied, "I was discussing with lady the relationship between poems and joy. As the saying goes 'The mind thrive with the Odes, Propriety is established through rites, The ending is accomplished through music' so I gave Lady the music I composed for her input and luckily she did not make fun of it."

Most interactions between the nobility and the officials cannot escape from poetry and music so Li Yuan is making use of this to show Ji Yanran that there is nothing else going on between him and Zhao Ya.

Zhao Zhi who has been silent all this while spoke up, "Mister Dong seems to hold no regards for music and poems at all!"

Xiang Shaolong almost felt like strangling her. Naturally she was secretly being sarcastic to him for his rude behavior towards her last night and at the same time jealous that Ji

Yanran has expressed a liking for him so she was trying to put him down.

Li Yuan was overjoyed on hearing this and said with a laugh, "At least Mister Dong is happy being with horses, so of course he need not bother about anything else."

Ji Zhong has always been aware of his own status and he had no choice but to be seated together at the same feast with a unrefined horse trader so he was already feeling unhappy. However he is a very deep person who will not reveal his thoughts. This time he made use of the opportunity to pander to Li Yuan and said, "Mister Dong is famed for rearing horses while Mister Li is well versed in poetry and music, so to each his own."

Xiang Shaolong had no intention of being a busybody but once he heard that, fury just rose up within him and he said, "Please forgive an unrefined person like me for not understanding. Among the seven states, the Qins can be considered the worse in terms of popularity of philosophical discussions and importance of rites and music, but why is it they are the only one who can be the biggest threat to our six states?"

Once he said that, everyone's expression changed, and they were speechless. Because this is a fact that cannot be debated.

Xiang Shaolong said icily, "Some people may look down on horse traders like me, and deride me for not understanding odes, but I can make the country and home strong with my

horses and fight against external enemies. The Qins are strong because they place more importance in military contributions, all other matters are put aside.”

Everyone knows that he is angry and they just listened quietly.

Xiang Shaolong continued, “As a part of life, poetry and music is good in molding a person’s temperament and beautifying things. But with such a situation now, the more important thing is a rich country and strong soldiers. Food and clothing is more basic than honor or disgrace. If one cannot even protect the country, why bother talking about poetry and songs. In the past King Goujian of Yue slept on sticks and ate gall and persevered, so he was finally able to take revenge. After I came to Handan, I find that everyone is engrossed in eating, drinking and having fun. With such environment, no matter how much you support poetry and music, sooner or later you will become slaves of a fallen country.”

The one who felt the worse was Zhao Zhi, to be reprimanded in her face by him so she lowered her pretty face quietly.

Li Yuan and Han Chuang’s expression became uneasy for they are indeed more engrossed in play and had totally ignored the grand plan of dealing with the Qins.

Zhao Mu remembered that ‘he’ grew up in the wilderness mountainous areas so he did not feel at all bewildered, even secretly thinking that when he becomes the King of Zhao in

future, he must give more important duties to this practical person.

The feelings of the other three ladies were not as direct for in this world where men are leaders, it is naturally the duty of men to protect the country. Instead they find him to be extraordinary for it seems that everyone else is intoxicated but he is the only sober person.

Ji Zhong smiled coldly and said, "Who will know who the last one standing is until the very end?"

Xiang Shaolong is already feeling very irritated with this person that Lord Dongzhou had sent. He eyes flashed icily as he stared at him and said, "People say that a normal person will only think of today's matters, a fool will only remember yesterday's matters and only the intelligent will have a open mind and think about tomorrow, or even possible events that will happen one year or ten years later and start making plans today. If one has to wait until a winner is found which by then will be too late for regrets, he might as well go home now and hug his woman and get as much sleep as possible."

Ji zhong's expression changed as he said angrily, "What does Mister Dong mean by those words? Who does not plan for the future, or are you the only intelligent one?"

Zhao Ya tried to play the peacemaker but Xiang Shaolong raised his hand to stop her. He smiled calmly and said, "Mister Ji thinks too much. I am only stating facts, so please do not think that I was pinpointing at anyone. I am a straightforward person and now I'm sharing weal and woe

with everyone here so I hope I can offer my help to protect the country and her peoples. But look what kind of reception I received. Anyone with eyes will know who will be the last one standing. This is not a time for argument, but a time to cast aside our preconceptions for only by knowing oneself and one's enemy, will we be able to stand a chance at fighting Qin."

Guo Kai and Le Cheng exchanged looks, finally understanding the reason for his anger, for he is blaming the King of Zhao for ignoring him because of Li Yuan.

Zhao Ba exclaimed "Excellent!" and turned towards Ji Zhong, saying "Horse Fanatic Dong is a straight forward person who speaks his mind and I like that. Mister Ji please do not blame him, his words are a reprimand for everyone at this table, including me. But his lecture does indeed set a person thinking."

How can Li Yuan be appeased, so he said with an icy smile, "Since that's the case, Mister Dong can jolly well not attend such a merry making feast, so why is he saying one thing, but doing another thing altogether?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled slightly and replied, "Mister Li is mistaken. A feast is a normal social activity, and the Qins have never banned feasts. I'm just making use of the topic being discussed to point out that some people are abandoning and ignoring the most important matters and only cares about having fun, or because of their own selfish

gains, are doing things that will only harm others but benefit themselves.”

He stared at him, lifted his arms and tugged at his collar, pulling down his top to reveal his bandaged shoulders and asked nonchalantly, “Can Mister Li tell me, who caused these sword injuries?”

Ji Yanran exclaimed ‘Ah’ and looked towards Li Yuan.

Li Yuan was caught off guard and was stunned, unable to speak.

It was only now that the others understand that these two person’s enmity is so deep to the extent that weapons are now being used.

Xiang Shaolong rearranged his clothes and said with a smile, “Naturally Mister Li would not know who did this and anyway I can’t be bothered with such lowdown people who use despicable means. I just want to prove to everyone here that I am not shooting people down without a reason.”

Xiang Shaolong’s word were meat to establish his image of a straightforward and open person. At the same time attacking Li Yuan so that this person would not dare to strike him again. Otherwise it’ll be a big problem if he wants to distance himself from the attack.

Li Yuan’s expression now looked as horrendous as anyone can imagine.

Zhao Mu said, “Mister Dong can relate your attack in detail to General Le, he’ll definitely help to give you justice.”

Xiang Shaolong guffawed in reply, "Such insignificant matters, why talk about it. Come, let me offer a toast to Mister Ji and Mister Li to thank them for listening to the complaints of an uncouth man like me."

Everyone lifted their cups so Ji and Li had no choice but to lift their cups and drink up as well.

They had just put down their cups when Zhao Zhi offered a toast to Xiang Shaolong, "I was ignorant and caused Mister Dong to be so angry, let me make use of this wine to offer my apologies."

Zhao Zhi has always been known for being stubborn and for those who know her well, this is the first time they see her being so meek.

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile after he drank up, "It's my fault, how can it be blamed on Miss Zhi."

Ji Yanran's eyes were exceptionally bright as she offered a toast to him, "Not only are Mister Dong's words surprising, but thought provoking as well. You will definitely have a great future."

What followed were toasts being offered to one another and the atmosphere returned to normal, at least it seems so on the surface.

Li Yuan was constantly disadvantaged tonight and Xiang Shaolong gained all the upper hand so he was anxiously talking to Ji Yanran who was sitting beside him, hoping to get back into her good grace. A pity that Ji Yanran now knows

that he is so despicable as to send men to ambush Xiang Shaolong and she wished she could kill him instead. Therefore she only gave him a few polite but icy replies.

Han Chuang who was seated beside Xiang Shaolong tapped him twice under the table to express his admiration. Zhao Mu gave him a look, to show that he is satisfied with his performance.

Guo Kai looks like he's deep in thought, obviously because Xiang Shaolong is not as simple as he thought, so he's now reevaluating him. Zhao Ya became quiet.

She too did not expect Li Yuan to have such deep enmity with this Dong Kuang to the extent that he'd send killers. She is an intelligent person so she guessed that this is because of jealousy, and he came to pander to her maybe because he had the intention of getting back at Dong Kuang. Although up to this point of time she has nothing to do with Dong Kuang at all, she was being made used of by Li Yuan. Once she thought of that, she can't help but feel a little regret.

She saw Xiang Shaolong stand up and looked at him in surprise.

Xiang Shaolong bowed suavely and said, "I thank Lady for this unique lantern feast, but I am used to sleeping early so I'll have to make a move first."

Everyone tried to make him stay, of course with the exception of Ji Zhong and Li Yuan.

Xiang Shaolong bowed again and retreated out of his seat.

Zhao Ba stood up and said, "The sword discussion meeting tomorrow, Brother Dong please remember to come on time."

Xiang Shaolong looked at Ji Yanran who was looking at him with a heated expression and asked, "Will Miss be gracing the sword discussion meeting with your presence?"

Ji yanran replied gently, "Since Mister Dong will be attending, how can Yanran not be there."

Once she said this, Li Yuan was immediately fuming while the other men all looked astonished.

Xiang Shaolong bid his farewell to them one by one and when it came to Guo Xiu'er's turn, this dainty lady exclaimed, "Xiu'er wants to go tomorrow to learn more as well."

Xiang Shaolong and Guo Zhong's brows both furrowed deeply at the same time on hearing that.

As for Zhao Zhi, he deliberately tried not to look directly at her but just bowed hurriedly and turned towards the main door.

The sounds of clothes and trinkets rustling were heard coming after him and Zhao Ya rushed up to his side and said, "Let me send you off!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he won't be able to reject her so he said graciously, "Lady is too polite!"

Zhao Ya accompanied him quietly along the long corridors in the residence. Since she is not talking, naturally Xiang Shaolong would not start a conversation as well.

Zhao Ya suddenly tugged at his sleeve gently and stopped walking.

Xiang Shaolong halted in surprise and lowered his head to look at her.

Zhao Ya looked extremely lost, her pretty eyes alluringly sad as she lifted her pretty face to look closely at his face.

Xiang Shaolong felt goose bumps rising under such scrutiny so he asked in puzzlement, "Lady, what's wrong!"

Zhao Ya shook her head slightly and said dejectedly, "I can't help but keep thinking of you as another person, only when I look closer did I realize that I was wrong."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled and he took the opportunity to change the topic and said coldly, "I don't think I have much similarity with Li Yuan! But luckily this is so."

Zhao Ya still held on to his sleeve as she lowered her head dejectedly and said, "Mister Dong, please do not laugh at me. Zhao Ya is just that pitiful girl who is constantly looking for that drop of honey! Why is Mister always treating me so cruelly?"

Xiang Shaolong's fury rose as he secretly thought that since she has found him, that drop of honey, then why is she so hard hearted as to betray him. He replied with a laugh, "Your

two drops of honey are in the great hall, please forgive me for not being able to stay.”

With a wave of his hand he dislodged her hold and walked away.

Zhao Ya looked as he disappeared behind the door and felt as if the world has suddenly lost its color. Right at this time, she knows that after Xiang Shaolong, this is the first time she has really fallen for another man but immediately she was grumbling in her heart, ‘Who cares who you are? Am I, Zhao Ya, one who can be rejected by you so easily.’

She stomped her feet and returned to the hall.

Xiang Shaolong walked out of the residence and the night breeze blew in his face and he was immediately energized.

He was really furious earlier. Those idiots from the six states only know how to fight amongst themselves but have no idea that big trouble is almost upon them.

At the same time he was in a dilemma. Although he is now the enemy of the six states, yet he still has some feelings for Handan, making him worry about the fate of this ancient city.

Then he thought of his own problem. What had seemed so easy originally, has not become extremely complicated. With the situation now, if he wants to capture Zhao Mu alive and send him back to Xianyang is quite impossible. And if he has to kill Le Cheng, this general who wields the military power of Handan, that would be even more difficult than ascending

heaven. The strong confidence he had when he first came is starting to waver.

An extra day in Handan will mean an extra day of danger. The biggest problem is of course because the important officials and famed generals of the other five states are concentrated here, the security and vigilance in Handan has risen greatly. Capturing Zhao Mu is not difficult, but to send him away will be fraught with difficulties.

Once he thought of this, he can't help but heave a great sigh. Sounds of hoof beats was heard coming nearer, and slowing down as it neared.

Xiang Shaolong had already guessed who has come after him so he said without even turning his head, "How do you do, Miss Zhi!"

Zhao zhi's crisp voice immediately replied, "How did you know it was me?"

Xiang Shaolong turned his head sideways to look at the gallant Zhao Zhi astride her horse and said with a smile, "Other than Zhao Zhi, who else would dare to come and meet my bad temper alone."

Zhao Zhi was originally looking down and staring at him but when she heard that, she lifted her pretty face to look at the night sky above the streets of Handan and said with a pout, "Wrong guess! Zhao Zhi has no time to bother with people like you."

Xiang Shaolong knows that she has already surrendered half her heart to him but she just cannot admit to it. However his heart can only contain Ji Yanran now, besides Zhao Zhi is Jing Jun's beloved so there's no way he can snatch someone's love away. There's really no way he can do this to his own brother. How awkward would it be between him and Jing Jun in future then? The way he forced her to leave last night, he didn't feel too good about it either.

The Zhao Zhi at this instant is especially alluring.

He chortled and asked, "Then why do you have the leisure to accompany me on my night tour of Handan?"

Right at this time a group of soldiers rode over in the quiet street, reminding them of the war which has not stopped in hundreds of years and which can still start at any time. Those patrol soldiers saw Zhao Zhi and greeted her respectfully.

Zhao Zhi nudged her horse forward to walk alongside Xiang Shaolong and said nonchalantly, "Don't you think you've offended everyone tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Why does it matter, didn't your people Meng Ke¹³ said 'They may be thousands of people against me, but I will go forward'.

Zhao Zhi looked down in surprise, "Why would Meng Ke be ours?"

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to slap himself. Up to this point of time he still regarded himself as an outsider so he

¹³ Meng Ke - Mencius

said with embarrassment, "No real meaning to that, just a slip of the tongue!"

Zhao Zhi stared at him with unsure suspicion and surprise and took some time before she uttered softly, "Get up my horse!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Where to?"

Zhao Zhi asked icily, "Afraid?"

Xiang Shaolong chortled, "Sharing a horse like that, Miss Zhi should be the one who is afraid."

Zhao Zhi replied evilly, "You didn't seem to be that considerate for others that night? Are you a man or not, get up the horse quickly!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that she was being sarcastic about that night when he jumped up her horse and took advantage of her so he shook his head and said with a wry laugh, "Your mouth is truly formidable. But since you've had experienced it before and knows that I am not a gentleman who can keep his hands to himself. With such a warm and soft body, my disobedient hands will enjoy themselves on Miss Zhi's alluring body!"

Zhao Zhi's pretty face tightened as her long, pretty eyes stared at him fiercely, "Who cares what you want to do, get up the horse quickly!"

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "My god!"

When a woman obviously knows that you have the intention of taking advantage of her, and yet insist on giving you the chance no matter how fierce she looks on the outside, what can this be other than she is secretly in love. This is indeed extremely alluring, and enough to make his head ache terribly.

Now it's as if he is riding on a tiger, unable to advance or retreat. He sighed and said, "It's so late! Can we talk about this tomorrow? I'd better go home and sleep!"

Zhao Zhi was so furious her face turned pale and she whipped her horse forward to block his way. With her hands on her hip, she pouted angrily and said, "I didn't expect you to be such a wishy-washy person. If you don't come up, I'll harass you the whole night so you won't be able to get a good sleep!"

When a woman gets angry, they are the most unreasonable. Xiang Shaolong stopped walking and said with a sigh, "Doesn't Miss already has someone you like? The way you are giving me such a bargain, I'm afraid it's a little... heh! A little 'that thing'!"

Zhao Zhi's delicate body shook on hearing this as her pretty face suddenly turned dark. It took a while before she gritted her teeth and uttered, "I do not belong to anyone. Dong Kuang! Are you coming up or not?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, it seems that Zhao Zhi has given her heart from 'that Xiang Shaolong' to 'this Xiang Shaolong'. It seems that this time the tables have

turned on him. His hands turned up in a helpless pose, he hardened his heart and said, "You asked for it!"

Before he finished his words, he has already leapt up the horse behind her back.

Zhao Zhi exclaimed softly and her long legs lightly clasped the horse's belly and the handsome steed started running. Xiang Shaolong's hands went forward and held her narrow belly which does not have an extra ounce of fat, his body at the same time pressed against her back and shoulder. This feeling of excitement immediately stirred Xiang Shaolong's lust.

However Zhao Zhi looked as if she felt nothing at all, her face still looked icy as she concentrated on riding, turning left and right on the quite streets of the ancient city, towards an unknown destination.

Xiang Shaolong leaned his head forward and inhaled deeply near her neck, then leaned into her face and said, "Miss's body is so fragrant!"

Zhao Zhi's expression looked wooden but made no show of any unhappiness of rejection. Of course it does not mean she approved or encouraged it, but just pursed her lips, as if she's made up her mind not to talk.

Xiang Shaolong became more outrageous as he moved his lips along her smooth face and said resolutely, "If you don't talk, I am going to take advantage of you."

Zhao Zhi said icily, "Aren't you already doing that?"

Even saints have a temper. Xiang Shaolong's 'temper' rose, as one of his hand rubbed her belly while the other moved up towards her twin peaks, slowly advancing threateningly.

Her muscles are full and supple, giving him much enjoyment.

Zhao Zhi's pretty face started to turn red as her delicate body trembled a little yet she continued to grit her teeth, not making any objections at all.

Xiang Shaolong's lust may be burning but Jing Jun's presence seems to be blocking between them like a ghost. He sighed dejectedly and gave up the grand plan of invading her chest as his hands returned to her belly. He even left her face and sat straight. The bamboo forest appeared in front, it turned out that Zhao Zhi is bringing him to her home.

Zhao Zhi reined her horse silently when she saw the bamboo forest, looking at the dim light that is flickering in her home up ahead as she made fun of him and said, "So Mister Dong is actually a gentleman?"

Xiang Shaolong was exasperated as he pulled her back hard. Zhao Zhi exclaimed softly as she fell into his arms.

In the darkness of the bamboo forest, they can't see each other at all but could smell each other. The excitement of their bodies touching was instead heightened because of this 'darkroom' surrounding.

Zhao Zhi leaned her head languidly against his broad chest, so nervous that her lips can't help but pant quickly.

Xiang Shaolong only have to shift his head down slightly and he would be able to enjoy her fragrant lips and he is sure that she will not resist at all.

Such a thought is indeed enticing. Xiang Shaolong's reason was swinging dangerously over the side of collapse when he sighed and said, "Aren't you that Xiang Shaolong's little lover? The way you and I... heh..."

Zhao Zhi's reply still sounded cold, "I've not fallen in love with you, so why does it matter?"

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed hoarsely, "Miss Zhi seems to be unaware that you are in my arms, yet you can say such words."

Zhao Zhi argued back, "I'm not as strong as you, you forced me into your arms, so what could I do?"

Xiang Shaolong chuckled, "Then why are you stopping your horse here? I didn't force you to do that!"

Zhao Zhi is indeed stubborn as she said nonchalantly, "I'll stop where I want to and do what I want to, it's none of your business."

Xiang Shaolong was so angry that he almost fell off the horse. He extended his hand and moved to caress her rounded thighs as he praised, "Miss Zhi's legs are firm and supple."

Zhao Zhi did not say a word and allowed his molestations.

Xiang Shaolong gritted his teeth and thought that since he's made a head start, he might as well continue. He has always been a flirt and with a beauty right in front of him, how can he have the resolution to resist. He was about to move his hands and invade the top and bottom at the same time when the sounds of dogs barking could be heard right ahead, accompanied with the sounds of light footsteps.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly retracted the hands that was caressing her chest and thighs whereas Zhao Zhi exhaled softly as she sat straight and rode the horse forward.

Both of them did not speak at all, but that soul tearing feeling is still so strong that it can melt any man or woman.

CHAPTER 11

Unable To Enjoy

[Translated by JEAN]

IN ZHAO ZHI'S elegant little house, Xiang Shaolong leaned on the couch in a relaxed manner while the two sisters Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi sat opposite him. The former was staring at him fiercely while the latter still maintained her icy look but her head was lowered in deep thought.

Shan Rou said stiffly, "I asked my sister to invite you here because I hope we can cooperate and deal with Tian Dan!"

Xiang Shaolong already knew he'd meet with this problem so he said, "If you are planning to assassinate him in Handan,

forget about getting me to do such a foolish thing with you. Even if you succeed you will not be able to escape.”

Shan Rou’s pretty face turned icy as she replied, “You’re the fool. We’ve already found out that Tian Dan has arrived at the outskirts of the city at dusk today, but he has yet to enter the city. The person escorting him is the famous general of Qi named Dan Chu, and they have an army of about 10,000. Therefore the only chance to kill him is when he is travelling light with minimal men into the city. The few men near that conniving thief, specially those two brothers called Liu Zhongfu and Liu Zhongshi, are not only excellent fighters but can tear lions and tigers apart alive. Look!”

She pulled down her collar to reveal almost half of her ample and fair bosom, but on it there is a sword scar that can shock anyone who sees it.

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to be so bold. His eyes feasted on her ample bosom for a long time before he nodded and said, “You’re considered lucky to be alive.”

Shan Rou readjusted her clothes, her eyes gleaming as she said, “Isn’t Tian Dan your great enemy? No one knows more about Tian Dan’s affairs other than me. I was once a maid at his residence, so now you understand the benefit of working together with us!”

Xiang Shaolong has no wish to entangle himself with them any further so he sighed, “Actually there’s nothing between Tian Dan and me at all. It’s just that I did not want to hurt

the both of you that night, that's why I followed your story and said that."

Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi were both dumbfounded.

An icy look came over Shan Rou's eyes and just as Xiang Shaolong was secretly exclaiming, she has already swiftly pulled out a dagger and leapt towards him like a tigress, the dagger aiming towards his chest.

Xiang Shaolong is extremely experienced in unarmed combat so with a fake move, not only did he grab the wrist of the hand that was holding the dagger, he also threw her over to the other side of the table and pressed down on her like a tiger.

Shan Rou kept struggling and even tried to bite him.

Xiang Shaolong lifted his head and pressed her arms down firmly, his thighs tightened around her pretty legs and at the same time looked warningly at Zhao Zhi, only to see her looking lost and dumbfounded as she watched her sister cursing and struggling under Xiang Shaolong's body.

Xiang Shaolong put his mind at ease as he started to enjoy the feeling of this body violently running against his, but at the same time he has no idea how to wrap up this horrible situation.

Shan Rou may be a lot stronger than the average woman but how can she fight against Xiang Shaolong, a muscular man of that physique. She struggled a little longer before she toned

down, her chest heaving as she stared at Xiang Shaolong with hatred, giving her another air of allure.

Zhao Zhi was still seated at the same place, not moving nor making any noise.

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head to look at this feisty beauty and asked with a smile, "I acted with kind intentions, why is Miss treating me like this?"

Shao Rou cursed, "Liar!"

Xiang Shaolong finally understood that she wanted to kill him in anger because she was lied to, and also disappointed that they no longer have his assistance. From this it can be seen that she actually regards him very highly.

He can clearly hear her heart beating, feel her pulse moving in her energetic body, and smell the faint fragrance from her dainty body. He shook his head and asked with a wry smile, "Still don't want to release the dagger?"

Shan Rou stared at him angrily for a moment before the corners of her mouth curved disdainfully as she relaxed her hand and let the weapon drop.

The tense atmosphere relaxed and Xiang Shaolong immediately felt the strong sense of their bodies so close together. Earlier Zhao Zhi had already ignited his lust so how can he control himself now. Immediately his body reacted in the most primitive way for a man.

Shan Rou was originally staring at him but suddenly she blushed and her lids closed a little, obviously she has fully felt his manhood pressing down.

Xiang Shaolong was extremely embarrassed and he said quietly, "If you promise not to attack me again, I'll release you immediately."

Shan Rou managed to utter her agreement. The look of a stirred beauty, appearing on the face of this strong and feisty woman, lures one to more imagination.

Xiang Shaolong threw her dagger towards the corner of the room first before squatting up slowly. He moved towards the wall and leaned there.

Shan Rou was still lying flat, as if she's lost the ability to get up. Her clothes are now in disarray and split open at the bottom, revealing her snowy white and long thighs.

Xiang Shaolong looked towards Zhao Zhi. This pretty younger sister turned her face away, not looking at him.

Shan Rou jumped up with the agility of a cat and without looking at Xiang Shaolong, uttered a single word through her gritted teeth, "Scram!"

Xiang Shaolong was unaffected and said with a smile, "If Miss Rou chases me away, you will definitely regret it for the rest of your life."

Shan Rou went to sit next to her sister as her eyes stared roundly at him, "Who do you think you are? Just looking at a liar like you is enough to irritate anyone."

Xiang Shaolong sighed and asked, "Do the two of you love your parents who have met with such misfortune?"

Shan Rou said angrily, "Isn't that an obvious answer?"

She may be rude but ultimately she was willing to answer the question, so her asking Xiang Shaolong to scram was only said in pique.

Xiang Shaolong tried his best to answer calmly, "To be able to exact revenge but not doing it, can be considered unfilial. But knowing very well that to take revenge is akin to sending yourself to death, causing great grief to departed parents, is also another form of not being filial. Under such circumstances, although living in shame, it's also a way of controlling oneself and repaying your parents."

Shan Rou was slightly shaken as she answered, "We don't need you to reprimand us, go back and enjoy your riches!"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, knowing that this woman really has some feelings for him, that's why she was so furious to find out she was lied to and now her words are filled with reproach.

Zhao Zhi looked towards him and said icily, "Now that everything is made clear, us sisters and you have nothing to do with each other. Mister Dong, please go home and enjoy your sleep! Even if we die, it's none of your business."

Her tone of voice was the same as her sister's. A feeling of pity welled up in Xiang Shaolong's heart as he asked gently, "Don't you want to see Shan Lan again?"

Both women trembled suddenly, staring at him incredulously.

Shan Rou exclaimed sharply, "What did you say?"

Xiang Shaolong stood up and went towards this pair of pretty sisters and knelt down on one knee, leaning his head forward to look at the two pretty faces and said earnestly, "Please trust me! Shan Lan is now at a very safe place, and has found a good man, waiting for you to meet her."

The icy look on Zhao Zhi's pretty face melted as she uttered, "You're not lying to us again! How could she have escaped the calamity?"

Xiang Shaolong used Dong Kuang's name and made a vicious vow.

The two girls exchanged look then hugged each other tightly, looking both dejected and overjoyed at the same time.

After the two women had settled down, Xiang Shaolong said, "I am not one who is bothered about wealth and riches. As for Tian Dan's matter, because I personally have no enmity with him, it's difficult for me to plan to kill him, not to mention that it's a very unwise thing to do. With the situation now, you can kill him but will not be able to escape. With the chance of success being so slim, why don't you live well for now and think of another way to deal with him?"

Shan Rou turned her pretty face away to look outside the window. Although she looked as if she's not listening, but

with her character, as long as she's not saying anything bad, it means that she is already tempted.

Zhao Zhi pleaded with him, "Where is Sister Lan now? How did you meet her. She... she married into your family?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, "Does Miss Zhi want me to lie to you again?"

Zhao Zhi stared at him angrily and pouted, "How I wish I could stab you too!"

Xiang Shaolong grinned, "Why don't you just punch me!"

Shan Rou turned back again and said with her emotions controlled, "What would make you help us assassinate Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong felt his head aching, what he said earlier seemed to be spoken in vain as he slapped his forehead and uttered, "Heavens! So you were not listening to me at all."

Zhao Zhi asked thru gritted teeth, "If both of us sisters offer ourselves to you at the same time, will you change your mind?"

Shao Rou's delicate body trembled but she did not say anything, only chewing her lip as she lowered her pretty face, for the first time revealing a look of shyness.

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to give such an outrageous suggestion and stared speechlessly at Zhao Zhi, who was looking at him unwaveringly. His eyes can't help but travel past the two ladies' delicate bodies, only to feel

his throat go dry. He coughed and said, "Miss Zhi must be joking. It's not that I do not wish to help, but I have my own reasons which cannot be revealed and I cannot be distracted by other matters."

Zhao Zhi said gently, "Why not this! If there is really no opportunity, my sister and I will definitely not force you to do on a death mission with us but if there is a chance that we can succeed alive, will you help us fulfill this dream of seven years? Since we've already become your woman, naturally we will not be totally unrelated to you."

Xiang Shaolong looked at Shan Rou, then looked at Zhao Zhi and was secretly lamenting, worried that if he uses strong words to reject them, he'll certainly hurt their pride. He sighed and said, "Hai! I am really moved by your sincerity and willingness to sacrifice but I cannot take advantage of others when they are in peril and obtain your precious bodies at this time. Why not this! Look at the situation first before making another plan! Oh, why have I not seen that Uncle Zheng of yours?"

Shan Rou saw that he has changed his mind so her expression warmed greatly. This Dong Kuang's status is special, smart and an excellent fighter with a lot of men under him. If he helps, there's no need to worry that things will not succeed.

Zhao Zhi replied, "His health is not so good, so other than fishing for news, we have no wish for him to worry himself over other matters."

Xiang Shaolong stretched lazily and yawned, "It's late! I should be going back to sleep too."

The two ladies stood up together with him.

Suddenly the three of them felt awkward over the ambiguous relationship between each of them.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he'd better escape as soon as possible and exclaimed, "No need to see me off!" and walked towards the door.

The two ladies exchanged looks and Zhao Zhi accompanied him to the main door and said, "Will you use my horse?"

Xiang Shaolong remembered her round and firm thighs, her supple breasts and almost wanted to embrace her and have some intimacy with her which he is sure she would not object. However he is not inclined to consider love matters again, and also because of Jing Jun, he forced down this strong urge and said, "No need, it's not too far away."

He walked towards the bamboo forest but Zhao Zhi still followed behind him so he said in puzzlement, "Miss Zhi, please go back! No need to send me off."

Zhao Zhi did not say a single word until they went into the darkness of the bamboo forest before she said quietly, "You don't have to go back."

Xiang Shaolong's heart 'danced' with joy. By saying that, Zhao Zhi is expressing her wish to offer her precious chastity to him and for a proud person like her, these are difficult words to express.

But he does not have the luck to enjoy this no matter how much he wants to.

He sighed and hardened his heart to reply, "There's no need for Miss to do this. If you truly like me, there's nothing more I can ask for. But since Miss's heart is already with another person and it's not as if you've truly fallen for a boorish man like me, then why must you cheapen yourself like this? I'm helping both of you not because I'm expecting rewards!"

Zhao Zhi pounded his back twice hard with her fists and pouted angrily, "I hate you to death!" before turning back and walking away.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled wryly. He was stoned for a moment before collecting his thoughts and made his way home.

Once he thought of the Sword Meet tomorrow, he became excited again.

The road in front is still foggy but he is confident that he will solve everything.

Although he knows the fate of some of the people in this era, however he has no idea what his own future would be.

No matter what, in this great era of the ancient warring states, life is truly more exciting than what he could have experienced in the 21st century.

VOLUME 8

CHAPTER 1

Zhaos' Resident

[Translated by SLYPHIAD]

WHEN Xiang Shaolong returned to the residence, Teng Yi who had been waiting for a while said, "Yanran is waiting in your room now."

Once he heard this, he furrowed his brows, and said worriedly, "Both Li Yuan and Lord Longyang will send someone to watch over her movement, by coming here so rashly looking for me, sooner or later she will be found out."

Teng Yi smiled, "I've already asked her this question. She said she's used to being constantly watched, so she's already trained two substitutes. This way she can temporarily get away from the people who obsessively pestered her to do things she likes to do. Unless someone dares to charge in her room, otherwise there is no way to know which one is the fake one, so she told me not to worry."

Then he continued, quietly whispering, "Third Brother, you're unbelievable. I can see that she's so in love with you that she can't even control herself. With a pretty girl like her falling for you, aren't you going to thoroughly enjoy this world's greatest pleasure?"

Xiang Shaolong can feel Ji Yanran's astonishing charm, that even this man of iron will could barely escape her charming attraction. Grinning, he was about to quickly return to his room so that he could transfer the lust stirred-up by Zhao Zhi and her sister on Ji Yanran's beautiful body when Teng Yi stopped him in the hallway towards his room.

Surprised, he turned towards Teng Yi, who looked at him with a determined expression, "I want to kill Tian Dan."

Xiang Shaolong was startled, suddenly remembering the tragic ending of Teng Yi's family, which in reality, indirectly came about due to Xiao Weimou's orders given by the

mastermind Tian Dan. And now, Teng Yi's beloved wife, Shan Lan's whole family's massacre was also due to Tian Dan. No matter what, it's hard for Teng Yi to take this lying down. Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel a headache when thinking about this.

Everyone knew that Tian Dan was one of the Warring States' period most fearful figures, not that different from Prince Xinling, and killing him is harder than ascending the Heaven. Besides they're already busy with their own affairs and are in no condition to complicate themselves further.

Teng Yi placed his hand on Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and solemnly said, "I know Third Brother is currently in a difficult position, we'll just wait for the opportunity to come up! I'm not one who will act rashly without weighing the consequences."

Xiang Shaolong breathed a sigh of relief, "Second Brother's problem is also my problem. Even if I have to cut myself in half, I won't quibble over it at all.

Teng Yi was moved and patted Xiang Shaolong's shoulder before he turned around and left.

Xiang Shaolong fastened his steps, quickly arriving at the inner chamber. Ji Yanran, scented with a sweet smell, threw herself into his embrace and kissed him passionately.

As he was about to remove the face mask, Ji Yanran blushed, "Don't! I want you to take me as Dong Kuang. Your display tonight made me thoroughly enchanted. Hai! Having to wait

until now to be intimate with you, I already felt like I had gone through a bitter suffering.”

At that moment, Xiang Shaolong was also burning with desire, his hands wasting no time in moving hurriedly over her arousing body, as he said with a smile, “When can Learned Lady Ji publicly surrender to Old Dong?”

Ji Yanran blushed as if she is drunk with wine, and gasped for breath, “Anytime is fine. Yanran really can’t bear a moment of separation with husband anymore.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed out loud, “No separation between men and woman can have two explanations, which is the one that Learned Lady Ji refers to?”

Under the ministrations of his wanton hands, Ji Yanran trembled and panted, “Either explanation is fine, I’ll leave it all for Master Dong to decide.”

Xiang Shaolong kissed her lips deeply and at the same time, roughly embracing her and moving towards the bed. Sitting at the edge of the bed, he let her snuggle in his embrace, still not letting go of her small lips. His empty left hand slipped through her front garment, wandering over her tender breast, fondling, rubbing and pinching.

Ji Yanran’s passion burst out suddenly.

Xiang Shaolong is after all a veteran in this and would not hurry towards the climax. He released her scorching hot lips and said with a smile, “I, Dong Kuang, probably am the only lucky person in the whole wide world who can confirm that

Yanran is not made of stone at all, but even more bold and unrestrained compared to other beautiful girls."

Ji Yanran reluctantly opened her eyes, "You can tease me however you like. Ai! I can't believe that you don't even need to a handsome face to become the jinx of all women. Tonight, I saw Zhao Ya, Zhao Zhi and that Guo Xiu'er, were almost moved to tears by the touchingly sad parable. That was one splendid and vivid story! Even Li Yuan was crazily jealous of you."

Xiang Shaolong felt ashamed deep inside and suddenly remembered something, "Have you crossed swords with Li Yuan?"

Ji Yanran suddenly sobered up from her euphoric state, slightly nodded, "Yanran's really muddled, I forgot everything when I saw you. Xiang Lang needs to be very careful with this person. His sword skill is quick, strange and elegant, not only wonderful to watch but also deadly. Although none of us emerged the winner, I already know that I'm not his equal and that he was giving in to me. Therefore his swordsmanship can only be described as unfathomable. From what I see... oh!"

The more Xiang Shaolong heard, the more alarmed he felt. Last time, he only won by a narrow margin with Ji Yanran. He could not gain the upper hand even if he tried with all his might, not to mention about giving in to her. From this comparison, Li Yuan's sword skill must be even better than his was before. Luckily after he found Mohist Swordplay's

Addendum, his sword skill advanced by leaps and bounds, otherwise, he could only admit defeat now.

Even though Ji Yanran did not finish her words, her underlying meaning is that Xiang Shaolong couldn't possibly beat Li Yuan, but she just couldn't bear to say it out loud! He was secretly breaking out in cold sweat. This Li Yuan, regardless of literature or sword skills, has the conditions to make Ji Yanran admire him.

It's just that he already had a head start, plus he was borrowing the 21st century's knowledge, that's the why he could win him. Otherwise, in the battle for love to win Ji Yanran's hand, he could only be the loser nursing his grievance.

Ji Yanran saw that he was speechless and thought that his pride was hurt, so she said apologetically, "One never knows who the ultimate winner will be in a contest between the highly skilled, but I still don't wish for you to fight with him, not because I believe that Xiang Lang would undoubtedly lose, but because I don't wish you to take this risk. Oh! What is the worth of an ordinary person's bravery? To be able to win on the battlefield is the true hero."

This was what's called digging oneself deeper into the hole. Xiang Shaolong knows that in Ji Yanran's eyes he doesn't look promising when compared. He smiled bitterly, "Love is like a battlefield. Li Yuan failed in winning through literature, so he will try winning by sword so as to humiliate me in front of you. Everyone knows that Learned Lady Ji is looking for a

husband who is unparalleled in both literature and sword skills. Li Yuan is trying to prove that he is this ideal person.”

Ji Yanran smiled, “Love is like a battlefield, how well said. Now, besides you, I have no interest towards others anymore. Do you think Ji Yanran is a woman that constantly changes her heart like a loose woman?”

Xiang Shaolong joyfully said, “Of course you’re not like that, but you’re our loosed woman shared by both me and ‘Horse Fanatic’ Dong, so it’s impossible to not be lascivious, is Learned Lady Ji going to disagree?”

Ji Yanran’s face turned red, raised an eye at him, leaned closer to his ear, “Then Yanran can only accept fate, for a married woman must obey her husband. Since my husband wants me to serve two men, I have no choice but be lascivious. Yanran can only resign oneself to adversity.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed out loud, embraced her and lied down on the bed all at once. Sure enough, Ji Yanran lost whatever restrain she had, becoming his dedicated promiscuous woman.

After two breaks, this beautiful woman cuddled in his embrace like a sheep, the corners of her mouth curved up with a satisfied smile, listening to Xiang Shaolong whispering sweet nothings in her ears, words that she will never tire of.

As a 20th century person, Xiang Shaolong does not have the behavior of men during this era who considers women as slaves. He understood the reasoning that women need love

and care, so all women that have been intimate with him enjoys a happiness that is hard to find in this era.

Listening to his words like 'You're my soul, you're my life' and other words like that, Ji Yanran was so happy that she kissed him to show her gratefulness.

Xiang Shaolong was definitely in love with this enchantingly beautiful woman.

After another hot kiss, Ji Yanran heaved a sigh, "If I can quickly become pregnant with Xiang Lang's own flesh and blood, Yanran will feel satisfied and fulfilled."

Xiang Shaolong at once felt cold sweat running down his body, secretly thinking that this is a big problem, and could only hum and haw as a reply.

As Ji Yanran was intoxicated with hope and joy, she didn't notice his dissent expression. Recalling something, she asked, "What is your relationship with Zhao Ya? Why does Li Yuan think that getting her could hurt you?"

Xiang Shaolong remembered the love hate relationship he had with Zhao Ya, and smiled wryly, "Li Yuan probably saw me paying attention to her frequently and thought that I am interested in her. But in actual fact it's another thing altogether and I have already told you everything about what happened in the past."

Ji Yanran replied, "I naturally understands husband's intention and knows that you are the type that considers old relationship, so you still feel a bit of love left towards Zhao

Ya. She really doesn't know how to cherish herself, letting herself fall to this state, but this type of woman on the contrary can really attract men. I think both Li Yuan and Han Chuang are captivated by her already."

All of a sudden, she grabbed his shoulder and seriously said, "You need to pay attention to Zhao Zhi. I saw that Li Yuan and Han Chuang are also interested in her. Men like them, if they want to win a woman, they will resort to despicable methods."

Xiang Shaolong knew that she is very observant, so he was shocked once he heard this. If that really happens, Jing Jun won't be able to take such a blow.

Ji Yanran bashfully looked down at her own breast, biting her lips, "Is it alright if Xiang Shaolong or Dong Kuang come love me again?"

Xiang Shaolong couldn't help laughing, "We'll just do it together, alright? Seems like I don't even need to teach you to become a slut."

Ji Yanran was too embarrassed and pouted and at once the room was imbued with lust, indescribable loving and touching.

The next morning, Xiang Shaolong slept till the sun passed the 2nd pole before forced himself to wake up, patting the bed beside him only to find it empty. Shocked, he sobered up before he realized that she had left.

Getting off the bed, he saw on Ji Yanran's bedside the note that she wrote in her delicate and pretty handwriting, mainly to say that she couldn't bear to wake him and so she left by herself. There were unavoidably words describing how unbearable it is to be separated, hoping that one day she can forever enjoy those sweet and charming words till sunlight.

Xiang Shaolong kneaded his backbone, remembering last night's preposterous activity and felt both joy and shock.

What's joyful was the boundless aftertaste. What's shocking was that he himself was so exhausted that he didn't even know when she left.

Last night, before the loving with Ji Yanran, he was already entangled with Zhao Zhi and her sister once, even though they did not complete the act, but his lust was continuously stirred up and that makes it easier for a person to be exhausted.

While washing and dressing, Han Chuang arrived looking for him.

Xiang Shaolong received him in the outer hall. After sitting, Han Chuang struck the table and laughed, "Brother Dong's performance last night was incredible. Who knows you might be able to receive Learned Lady Ji's favor without the aphrodisiac. If you succeed, would you mind a sharing the cup with me, so I can have a taste of her flavor?"

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to kill this pervert with a punch but on the outside he perfunctorily said, "Marquis,

you're making fun of me. Learned Lady Ji was only interested in me briefly, it doesn't even count as having a chance with her."

Not waiting for the other party to have a chance to speak, he asked "After I left, how did Li Yuan react?"

Han Chuang replied with pleasure, "That fellow's expression was very interesting, continuously rolling his eyes, seems like he hates you to the bone. As soon as Brother Dong left, Zhao Zhi, that beautiful girl, hurriedly took leave, did she come looking for Brother Dong?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly blamed Zhao Zhi and remembered that they encountered several Zhao soldiers so he had no choice but to admit the encounter. He showed a worried expression, "Don't think that I got lucky or something. I did get chased by her, but only to get a lashing from her. She even nearly pulled out her sword and struck me. But I detest getting entangled with women or children, so I grudgingly endured her anger. Oh! Don't mention it anymore."

Han Chuang breathed a sigh of relief once he listened to what happened, "Can't believe that there are so many top-of-the-line beautiful women here in Handan. That Guo Xiu'er is not too bad either, it'll be a pity if she's taken by Li Yuan."

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed, no wonder Han has weakened to this state, all because the Han's government is controlled by men like the marquis, who only indulged in drinks and women. He said, "For the Sword Discussion gathering, has Marquis arranged a lesson to teach Li Yuan?"

Han Chuang said excitedly, "It's funny when we think about it. This time it can be said that we three countries are uniting to deal with the heartless Chu people. It turned out that Zhao Mu, Lord Longyang and me all coincidentally want to send our best swordsman to pass themselves off as one of Zhao Ba's men to teach Li Yuan a lesson. Let's see how this kid can avoid the misfortune of being disgraced in the field."

Xiang Shaolong remembered the pillow talk he had with Ji Yanran last night about her evaluation of Li Yuan's high level sword skill. He was secretly sighing, thinking that the result might be different from what Han Chuang originally wished for when Wu Guo arrived to report that Zhao Ya has come to look for him.

Xiang Shaolong naturally felt very embarrassed. Han Chuang's face suddenly became stiff as he said, "It seems like even Zhao Ya is also interested in you. Hey! That flirtatious woman is really very enticing, I better leave first then."

Xiang Shaolong of course wished he could scam quickly, but if he did that, Han Chuang would hold a grudge. He smiled, "Marquis, please remain. So we can give the Lady a pleasant surprise."

Then he asked Wu Guo to invite Zhao Ya in.

Han Chuang naturally had no intention to leave, so he didn't argue. Then, he pulled up a polite expression. From this, it could be seen how infatuated he was with Zhao Ya.

Following Wu Guo, Zhao Ya, came in filled with a smile, causing Xiang Shaolong to be so confused. Could it be that when he left her last night, his scowl made her more in love with him instead?

The two of them stood up, welcoming her.

Zhao Ya, on seeing Han Chuang, felt slightly stunned, displaying a flash of unhappiness before resuming her smile and said, "So Marquis has also come here."

Han Chuang smiled, "If I know that Lady is also coming, we could have come together, so we can have more time together."

Xiang Shaolong knew immediately that both of them were together again last night. He felt so angry that he wanted to give Zhao Ya two tight slaps except that that besides thinking about it, he couldn't do anything else.

Zhao Ya couldn't believe that Han Chuang could expose their intimate relationship in front of Horse Fanatic Dong. She felt embarrassed and ashamed, and furious at the same time. Last night, she let Han Chuang remain because it was an inexplicable subconscious thought to exact revenge on Dong Kuang for his attitude. After she woke up this morning, she regretted her actions, and now being exposed in front Xiang Shaolong by Han Chuang, it is indeed extremely embarrassing and she bowed her head.

Xiang Shaolong reluctantly forced a smile, "Since that is the case, why don't I let Lady and Marquis use this place for more happy reunions."

Han Chuang saw that he has made his stance clear that he wants to withdraw from the fight and was grateful. He smiled, "Brother Dong, please don't do this. Lady came this time specially to visit, at the very most I can only be considered as company."

Zhao Ya returned to her normal attitude, surreptitiously glanced at Xiang Shaolong, "I don't have any particular business too. I was only passing by and was afraid that Mister Dong doesn't know the way to the Zhaos' Martial Arts School, so I thought that we might go together."

She then ruthlessly glared at Han Chuang, her tone icy cold, "Marquis, if you don't have any other business, please don't let us hold you back! Zhao Ya has some questions regarding breeding horse that I would like to consult with Mister Dong."

Han Chuang couldn't believe that after last night's coupling like they were man, this woman could suddenly change her tone and be so heartless, not leaving any leeway. Feeling furious inside, he respectfully replied, "So Lady can change into a different person in the daytime. Since that is the case, Marquis can only look for you at night then."

Ignoring Xiang Shaolong's persuasion to stay, he flicked his sleeves and left.

Leaving the two of them, the atmosphere turned unbearably awkward.

Zhao Ya was so angry, her face paled. After sitting down and drinking a cup of hot tea, she still couldn't say a word.

Xiang Shaolong intentionally stayed silent and leisurely savored the hot tea.

After awhile, Zhao Ya couldn't endure it anymore and said, "Is Mister Dong irritated that Zhao Ya is not more self-respecting?"

Xiang Shaolong leisurely sipped a gulp of tea again, his eyes glinting sharp radiance, observing her. Slowly he said, "Lady's too sensitive. It's all Lady's personal business who you want to accompany at night. I don't have any right to ask any question, even more so to say the right to be angry at Lady."

Zhao Ya frowned and said worriedly, "It's all because of you. Last night, all I can think about is accompanying you, but instead I got your heartless treatment. My heart felt cold and bitter, so..."

Xiang Shaolong became indefinably angry and interrupted her, "Your word is odd, Lady. You were still fooling around with Li Yuan during the day, is that what you meant by wholeheartedly wanting to accompany me? Even though I don't consider myself to be a prude. I still wouldn't be so shameless as to get myself entangled in this."

These few sentences implied a great insult towards Zhao Ya. However, not only is she not angry, but her eyes became slightly red as she said, "Zhao Ya knows she's wrong, if Mister Dong doesn't resent me, Zhao Ya will observe the constraints as a woman should be in future. Can Mister Dong understand Zhao Ya's feelings?"

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to be so meek and subservient. A pleased feeling flitted through his heart as he sneered, "Lady is too serious. How could I have the right to detest you. Even if I do, I also won't believe empty words."

Suddenly he stood up and blandly said, "Lady clearly knows that Li Yuan is using Lady to hurt me, yet you still can't help but throw yourself into his embrace. So who can guarantee that this situation won't be happening again? If I like someone, I definitely wouldn't be turning towards Li Yuan, Zhao Mu and Han Chuang, flitting from one to another. Lady, please go back! I have many businesses to attend to."

His sarcastic words were driven straight into Zhao Ya's heart. She finally could not tolerate it any further and stood up angrily, saying incensely, "Dong Kuang, you're great! Have you humiliated Zhao Ya enough! Are you the only man in the whole world? I want to see what kind of end you will have."

She turned around and stalked off, not even turning her head once.

Xiang Shaolong was delighted, but also blamed himself allowing his feeling to take control. Under current circumstances, offending this slut with the most influence in Handan brings only harm but not advantage. However, he couldn't care too much now.

After finding Teng Yi and talking to him for a while, he then made his way to the Zhao Martial Arts School.

The Zhao Martial Arts School was located in the east of Handan, occupying a wide ground. They not only have

several connecting compounds to form the main building, but there's also a practice courtyard, shooting range and horse tracks that were specially set up to train warriors. Only after careful selection, the talented ones will be recommended to the Zhao military. So Zhao Ba is undoubtedly the state of Zhao's head army instructor, holding an exalted position and real power.

The Sword Discussion gathering will be held in the training ground in front of the main residence.

When Xiang Shaolong arrived, it so happened that the warriors in the school were split into three pairs, practicing using wooden swords and long spears with the sharp points wrapped up. On one side, there were more than 200 seated warriors and on the other side, there was a big stand where seats were set up.

Xiang Shaolong was briefly late. Lord Longyang, Zhao Mu, Le Cheng, Guo Kai, Han Chuang, Guo Zhong, Guo Xiu'er and the others had arrived. However, he did not see Zhao Ya, whom he angered earlier. Li Yuan and Ji Yanran still hadn't appeared as well.

In addition, there were several military officers and dozens of warriors who look like house warriors who were chatting in groups; no one paid any attention to the show on the training ground.

Zhao Ba were talking to Zhao Mu and Guo Zhong when he saw Xiang Shaolong and welcomed him with pleasure, "In any occasion that Mister Dong attends, there won't be any

awkward silences. Come! Let me introduce you our school's four main instructors."

He led Xiang Shaolong towards the stand where Zhao Zhi and the four instructors were standing.

Zhao Zhi saw Xiang Shaolong and she pouted disdainfully before purposefully walking away to search for Guo Xiu'er to talk. On seeing that girl's anger, Xiang Shaolong started to feel apologetic.

When those four instructors saw Xiang Shaolong, they all revealed a look of concentration as they sized him up.

Zhao Ba smiled at them and said, "This is the person that I've mentioned to you often, Mister Dong Kuang."

Those four promptly greeted him.

After Xiang Shaolong said a few polite words, Zhao Ba introduced the biggest and tallest one amongst them, a man only slightly shorter than Xiang Shaolong by an inch, and said, "Dai Feng is our school's number one instructor. His sword skill within the Zhao border is well-known. This time we will let him test the boastful lad. Let's see how awesome he can be."

This Dai Feng's figure was stout, with a thick waist, around 30 years of age. His bearing was calm and composed. The other three was a little bit nervous, far different from his cold demeanor.

Xiang Shaolong saw that his sword was hanging on his right waist and his left hand was also more powerful and sturdy

than his right hand, apparently he's used to using his left hand to deal with his enemies. From the right-handed swordsman's perspective, the left-handed sword is the hardest to defend, whereas for the left-handed swordsman, he is used to fighting with right-handed swordsmen. Just from this point, the left-handed swordsman already has the advantage.

The other three were Huang Yan, Cheng Heng and Lu Zhirong. All were very polite towards Xiang Shaolong.

Cheng Heng whispered, "I heard that Mister Dong was ambushed by Li Yuan's underlings. Dai Feng will help you extract your revenge from him."

Xiang Shaolong speculated that these people must have thought that his sword skill was average, but this is a good thing, so he thanked him at once.

At this time, Li Yuan arrived, and surprisingly accompanied by Zhao Ya, following behind him were ten odd of his family warriors. The burly one who left a big impression on Xiang Shaolong when they ambushed him was shockingly amongst them.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly furious. Li Yuan seemed totally unconcerned that he'll be exposed. It clearly shows that he holds no regards for him at all, knowing that Xiang Shaolong can't do anything to him.

Zhao Ya was very affectionate with Li Yuan. Han Chuang, who was chatting with Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu'er, on seeing this, changed his expression.

After Zhao Ba excused himself from Xiang Shaolong, he led Dai Feng and the other instructors to welcome them.

Li Yuan was wearing a martial art uniform, fitted with shoulder armors, wrist band, breast shield and sleeveless leather garment. He looked very awe-inspiring and insufferably arrogant.

Zhao Zhi and the other girls stared blankly at him.

Even though Xiang Shaolong saw that this turn of event was not too encouraging, he's helpless to do anything about it.

Zhao Mu came beside him and whispered, "Let's see how long this kid can stay arrogant?"

Xiang Shaolong replied in a deep voice, "Who have you prepared to deal with him?"

Zhao Mu proudly said, "I will send out a swordsman, named Luo Xiang. With him alone, it will be more than enough to handle Li Yuan. We also have Lord Longyang's household's number one swordsman, Jiao Xu and Han Chuang's follower, Han's famous swordsman, Fu Jianyin, to give Li Yuan a lesson."

Then, he pointed them out one by one, all of them are brave and ferocious young men.

Xiang Shaolong didn't feel as optimistic as him, if that fellow or his underlings wins, all of them would lose face instead. Even he would find it hard to walk with pride beside Ji Yanran. When he thought about this, he couldn't help but

feel a bit regretful that he didn't invite Teng Yi to come together.

Li Yuan harbored a smile, exchanged greetings with the people that Zhao Ba introduced one by one, looking as if he is assured of success.

His group of house warriors all stared at Xiang Shaolong, looking as if they would like to stir up trouble.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed and knew that Li Yuan's main target today is him. Even if they're only using wooden swords. If they intended to play viciously, they can still cripple their opponent anytime. Naturally that is Li Yuan's intention towards him.

Zhao Mu also came to this realization, and said furiously, "Would your attackers be amongst those people?"

Xiang Shaolong gave a cold snort, not saying anything at all.

Zhao Mu said angrily, "I've never seen anyone more arrogant than him before."

Xiang Shaolong whispered, "Anger and impatience will hinder the bigger plan. It's not worthwhile to fight with him over personal feelings, the real issue is more important."

Zhao Mu looked at him with admiration and nodded in agreement.

Both of them saw Zhao Ya laughing happily beside Li Yuan and their tempers rose. Zhao Mu cursed quietly, "Bitch".

Li Yuan continuously paid attention to Xiang Shaolong, even deliberately teasing Zhao Ya, seemingly to demonstrate his might.

Zhao Mu was about to lead Xiang Shaolong towards the stand to sit when Li Yuan walked out of the crowd, strode over and greeted them, staring at Xiang Shaolong, saying "Brother Dong has an outstanding sword skill, would you be interested to try a set with my men?"

He purposely raised his voice, to let others hear his deliberately humiliating challenge.

All of them immediately quieted down, watching Xiang Shaolong's reaction.

At this time, Zhao Ya came up behind Li Yuan with his swordsmen, all stared at him disdainfully.

Xiang Shaolong couldn't stand Zhao Ya's deliberate contemptuous look and forced himself to calm down. He stared at the strong and tall swordsman behind Li Yuan who previously ambushed him and smiled, "May I know the name of this brother here?"

When he saw Li Yuan nodding his head, that swordsman shouted loudly, "I am Lou Wuxin, would you deign to grant me an instruction?"

Xiang Shaolong blandly replied, "At present, this place is full of expert swordsmen. When will someone who only knows how to breed horses get a turn here. It's better to hide one's inadequacy silently than to show one's incompetence."

Li Yuan and the others heard this proverb for the first time 'it's better to hide one's inadequacy silently than to show one's incompetence. They briefly pondered over it before they understood it. All of them laughed mockingly.

Zhao Ya derisively interrupted, "Mister Dong, it's very rare that you know where you stand."

Xiang Shaolong's eyes flashed briefly and gave Zhao Ya a cold glance. This pretty girl's heart palpitated with terror, unable to continue with her words. She's not a timid person, but because for that instant, this Dong Kuang's expression was like Xiang Shaolong, giving her a weird feeling.

Lou Wuxin saw this and shouted fiercely, "Who dares to be rude to Lady?"

Zhao Mu's countenance changed, as he was about to rebuke him when Li Yuan took the chance to shout, "Wuxin, move back. Who told you it's your place to say anything in here?"

Lou Wuxin took a step back without saying a word but both of his eyes still burned with murderous glare towards Xiang Shaolong, seemingly unable to accept his failure in murdering him that day.

Li Yuan gave a hypocritical smile, "My warrior is just so straightforward. Mister Dong, please don't hold it to your heart."

Everyone could tell that on the surface he seemed to be rebuking his man, but was in fact, secretly commending him.

For a short while, a heavy sense of hostility loomed in the air.

Zhao Ba came over at this time between these two people filled with animosity and mediated, "Why don't everyone go up the stand for a cup of hot tea. How does that sound?"

Li Yuan gently said to Zhao Ya beside him, "Lady, please go up to the stand first. I haven't exchanged a greeting with Mister Guo yet!"

Li Yuan apologized and walked towards Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu'er, who were standing beside Guo Zhong.

Zhao Mu exchanged eyes with Zhao Ba before pulling Xiang Shaolong up towards the stand.

Han Chuang waved them over to sit beside him, and said with a cold snort, "This kid has become more and more ridiculous, I really want to see his face after a crushing defeat."

Xiang Shaolong had already calmed down, but on seeing Zhao Zhi, either intentionally or unintentionally, chatting and laughing Li Yuan in the distance, gave him additional worry.

Beside Ji Yanran, all the invited guests had arrived.

Suddenly, hoof beats could be heard.

From the tall gate, this peerless woman, who is famed throughout the world for her literature and sword skills, wearing a snowy white martial art uniform, galloped in.

Li Yuan hurriedly left Guo Xiu'er and Zhao Zhi, coming forward to welcome her.

Without waiting for Li Yuan to come and lead her horse, Ji Yanran gracefully jumped off the horse and walked past Li Yuan without even stopping towards the stand.

Li Yuan chased after her, eagerly flattering her, which she replied noncommittally. When she got up the stand, she smiled and greeted everyone before walking straight towards Xiang Shaolong and smiled, "So Mister Dong already arrived, causing Yanran to make a trip for nothing!"

Once the words were out, Li Yuan who was beside them paled suddenly, both eyes staring venomously at him.

Han Chuang was in joy, stood up hurriedly to give up the seat. Ji Yanran didn't decline and happily sat beside Xiang Shaolong. Zhao Ya, who was looking from the other side, suddenly had an unnatural expression as well.

Xiang Shaolong felt exalted.

This time, the crowd went up the stand one after another, filling up the hundred or more seats in the stand, Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu'er followed Guo Zhong to Li Yuan's side.

Li Yuan resentfully returned back to Zhao Ya's side.

Zhao Ba clapped twice, getting everyone's attention and smiled, "Everyone, please watch and give comments for our school's swordsman performance first."

With a command, the school's swordsmen who had been waiting for awhile came out to the field, their left hand holding a shield and right hand holding a sword, arranging themselves in a formation. Under the sound of the beating drums, the demonstrated the various forms of attacks and simulated a fight, immediately receiving applauses.

But everyone knew that the real performance was yet to be performed.

CHAPTER 2

Duel At The School

[Translated by SLYPHIAD]

NEXT was riding and archery performance, all were brilliant and pleasing to watch. It could be seen that Zhao Ba took painstaking care to train all of his swordsmen.

Xiang Shaolong thought that it's a pity, if it wasn't because Zhao had a muddleheaded king like Xiaocheng, it would have a bright prospect.

Ji Yanran leaned near his ear and said intimately, "I don't care anymore, from today onwards, I will follow you."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed in surprise, "Isn't it too quick? Did you see that Lord Longyang is staring at us?"

Ji Yanran chuckled, "He's not suspicious of us, but just jealous of Yanran. Everyone knew that neither man nor woman fellow loves unrefined and straightforward men like Mister Dong. If you speak vulgarity with him, he'll be really excited!"

Xiang Shaolong gave a wry smile, shook his head, "Let me chase after you for another two to three days! Otherwise if a beautiful woman like you can be subdued by a man with just two or three tricks, it could really damage your Learned Lady reputation."

Ji Yanran pouted, "Whatever suits you then! But I want you to accompany me every night."

Xiang Shaolong joyfully replied, "Of course, it's all that I wish for!"

Suddenly, applause could be heard non-stop, the school's swordsmen returned successively to the seats opposite the stand, leaving only Zhao Ba standing in the center of the field.

Everyone stopped talking and looked at the owner of the training school.

The applause swiftly stopped.

Zhao Ba raised his voice, "Our training school was able to invite the famous master swordsman, Mister Li Yuan, to give us instructions on our swordsmen's performance. It is

indeed our honor. We hope that Mister Li Yuan won't be stingy in giving us his advice."

Guo Zhong chuckled and interrupted, "This time it's all about exchanging pointers, everyone should control the force exerted. I don't wish to watch any heart-stopping scenes like bones or flesh torn today."

He and Zhao Ba are close friends, naturally he could tell that Zhao Ba was really furious about Li Yuan's arrogance, so he made use of his status to advice both parties.

Li Yuan smiled, "Mister Guo, you can relax. I only came here with the intention of having fun. Besides, there are also four beauties here! Mister Guo, relax."

Once he said that, all of the school's swordsmen were burning with anger. During this period, martial arts was blooming. Everyone regarded martial arts and sword skills as a prestigious and important matter. But he instead said that he only considered it as a game, meaning that he holds no regards for his opponents.

Zhao Mu leaned his head toward Ji Yanran and enquired her intention, "Miss Ji, don't you think that Mister Li Yuan's words are a bit unwarranted?"

On the other side, Han Chuang snorted, "Mister Li is too arrogant."

Ji Yanran smiled, "But his abilities are truly extraordinary, he wasn't lying."

Those two people didn't expect that after she had publicly shown her liking towards the Horse Fanatic, she would still defend Li Yuan and were both momentarily rendered speechless.

Xiang Shaolong knew about Ji Yanran's independent thinking, she wasn't going to change her mind because of other people. Unless he could win Li Yuan publicly, otherwise in her heart, he, Xiang Shaolong, will never be on par with Li Yuan in this aspect.

Therefore, for this beauty that always had strict criteria for her husband, this will always be a form of regret.

While he's pondering, that school's first instructor had already entered the field and raising his hands in greeting towards Li Yuan, said, "I am Dai Feng, please grant me your instruction, Mister Li."

Li Yuan sized up Dai Feng and blandly replied, "Dong Luzi, come down and have some fun with Brother Dai Feng!"

The crowd's uproar rose from all directions, no one could believe that Li Yuan only sent his man to accept his challenge. Obviously showing that Dai Feng is not qualified to challenge him yet.

Everyone from the school, from Zhao Ba all the way down, were all indignant.

Zhao Mu whispered towards Xiang Shaolong, "Oh no! If Dai Feng lost, Zhao Ba probably wouldn't be able to hold back his anger and will personally challenge Li Yuan."

While Ji Yanran whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ear, "This Dong Luzi and Lou Wuxin are Li Yuan's most reputable and great swordsmen. They are very famous in Chu."

Le Cheng who was sitting behind leaned forward and said, "I also heard about this Dong Luzi. Allegedly he's from the Chu Mohist and had travelled to Lie looking for teachers and visiting friends. I can't believe that he's become Li Yuan's man."

At this time, 20 old year old man who is tall and thin like a pole, with a pale face and no moustache, walked down the stand from the seats on Li Yuan's side towards Dai Feng and said gently and politely, "Brother Dai, please give direction!"

After Dai Feng returned the greeting, the youngsters brought out the wooden swords and helped both swordsmen wear the armors that protected their head, chest and vital spot at the lower body, as swords are merciless and may cause accidental injury. But this is only effective if the fighters control their force. To an expert swordsman, even if it's only a wooden sword, it still has the capability to kill and no armor can stand against it.

Two swords met in the air, testing the opponent's arm strength, then retreating back, demonstrating the sect's stance.

Applauses were suddenly heard, then stopped.

The crowd all held their breath in silence, looking on in concentration.

Dai Feng stepped in his battle stance, probing and moving towards the opponent, waving the wooden sword energetically, displaying impressive strength.

In contrast, Dong Luzi held his sword and stood erect, immovable like a mountain, only staring coldly at Dai Feng.

Dai Feng retreated two steps back and suddenly roared as he moved forward as quickly as lightning, the sword blade slashed swiftly up into the air, emitting a whistling noise as it sliced thru the air with an unbelievable strength.

Han Chuang and the rest started cheering him on. The warrior school's swordsmen were even more excited, giving out thunderous support. On the contrary, on Li Yuan's side, everyone sneered, showing extreme confidence.

This time, Zhao Zhi, who was sitting on the other side of Li Yuan, started to feel regretful. She was purposely being affectionate with Li Yuan. Partly because she was indeed charmed by Li Yuan, but mainly because she was trying to anger Xiang Shaolong. But ultimately, she still belongs to the school and naturally she won't want her own side to lose. But because she was sitting beside Li Yuan, she's too embarrassed to cheer loudly and is now in a dilemma.

Li Yuan clearly understood her troubles so while everyone's attention was still on the field, he quietly stretched his hand over and held her slender fingers which she had placed on her thigh, leaning near her ear and spoke softly, "On Miss's account, Li Yuan definitely won't hurt anyone from your school."

Zhao Zhi's tender body trembled and in her confused state of mind she actually allowed him to freely hold her hand.

Zhao Ya noticed their odd behavior and got closer to them, saying with a slight pout, "Mister Li, you are so caring!"

Li Yuan who has often frequented brothels, was secretly happy as he said with a smile, "Didn't Lady like my playboy style?"

Zhao Ya shot him a condescending look and sat straight; her heart was again filled with Dong Kuang's unparalleled heroic spirit and couldn't help but sigh. She secretly pondered why when she saw Li Yuan fooling around with other women, she didn't care much about it, but when she saw Ji Yanran only sitting beside Dong Kuang, her heart felt very uncomfortable.

There was a sound "Dong!", Dong Luzi lifted his sword to parry, at the same time moved diagonally, avoiding Dai Feng's second attack which came one after another.

Zhao Mu, Han Chuang, Le Cheng and the others are all expert swordsmen. With one look, it was easy to know that not only was Dong Luzi's arm strength not inferior to Dai Feng's, he's also a very good strategist, deliberately not fighting head on so that he can erode Dai Feng's strength.

As expected, Dong Luzi followed by putting a defensive stance, under his opponent's chain of relentless attacks, repeatedly dodged. On the surface, it seemed like Dai Feng has the upper hand but in reality, Dong Luzi was in no

danger at all, only waiting for the opportunity to counterattack.

A round of supports could be heard from all corners, cheering for Dai Feng.

Zhao Zhi suddenly came out her daze and wanted to pull her hand back but did not expect that Li Yuan would hold her hand tightly and not let go. He even placed the back of his hand on top of her thigh and spoke in her ear, "Do Miss Zhi dislike me?"

Zhao Zhi developed a sense of guilt for betraying Xiang Shaolong and Dong Kuang and looked down, "Other people can see us, you know?"

Li Yuan loftily replied, "A true man stands upright in the world. Why should he be afraid of others' gossip? As long as you don't dislike Li Yuan, I can assume responsibility for everything."

This person is very good with words, and also understood how to flatter women. Even Ji Yanran nearly fell in love with him. Zhao Zhi's does not have much experience about men-women relationship. Furthermore, she was angry about Dong Kuang's heartlessness, so her heart was momentarily confused, thus allowing him to take advantage of her.

Li Yuan knew that they are in public and thus he cannot go overboard so he was secretly thinking of bringing her back to his residence later for some fun. Therefore he did not molest her further.

Guo Xiu'er, who was sitting beside Zhao Zhi, was paying attention to Li Yuan and on seeing that he was flirting with Zhao Zhi, her pretty face changed and felt resentful.

During the warring states period, the distance men and women had to keep from each other was very different from the period after Han Dynasty, where strict Confucian teachings was flourishing. However, it's still not considered proper etiquette for men and women to flirt in public and Guo Xiu'er couldn't help but discount her good impression of Li Yuan.

At this time, Xiang Shaolong's suddenly decided to turn and look at Li Yuan and as luck would have it, Li Yuan was also looking at him. Even though they were separated by ten more seats, Xiang Shaolong could still clearly see that Li Yuan was holding Zhao Zhi's hand, and he can't help but flash a look of hatred through his eyes, extremely furious.

Li Yuan was pleased with himself on seeing that and smiled and nodded at him.

Zhao Zhi followed Li Yuan's gaze and looked over, straight into Xiang Shaolong's eyes and she was suddenly reminded of Xiang Shaolong. Her heart shuddered and she forcefully pulled away her hand away from Li Yuan's devilish grasp.

Li Yuan of course didn't know about the complicated relationship between Xiang Shaolong and her, and only thought that she was embarrassed for being caught in the situation with him. Instead he gently rubbed her bountiful

thigh, before sitting properly and ignored Xiang Shaolong to continue watching the competition.

Xiang Shaolong's face was furiously stern as he turned back towards the fight on the field, fury burning inside. For the first time, he started to feel the need to challenge Li Yuan.

Ji Yanran saw everything and whispered, "Don't act impulsively. If you're hurt by Li Yuan, you'll have more to lose."

These few words was like pouring oil into fire, Xiang Shaolong made an effort to push down his anger, after mulling over things for awhile, turned towards Zhao Mu, "Can we send someone to invite one of my family warriors?"

Zhao Mu immediately understood and after asking clearly who this person was, he ordered someone to summon him.

At this moment, Dai Feng had at least given out 40 more moves, and yet he still couldn't do anything to that Dong Luzi, even the supporting cheers slowly died down.

Dong Luzi knew that the opportunity had come. Looked up and smiled as he changed from the defending position to the attacking position, erecting his wooden sword to force his way into his opponent's sword formation, executing an exquisite and magnificent sword move. He dispelled each move as it came and he kept his sword attacks in a very tight circle such that Dai Feng's is unable to properly execute his way of brash fighting which uses wide sweeps of his sword.

Zhao Mu and the others all sighed in despair, even Zhao Ba who had absolute confidence in Dai Feng's skills was frowning.

Zhao Zhi, who was sitting beside Li Yuan, saw that her side was facing danger, came totally to her senses. She secretly blamed herself for not keeping a line between friends and enemies, even letting Li Yuan take advantage of her and felt ashamed towards her Teacher and school. However, if she leaves now, it would be too obvious and she was in a dilemma.

The two fighters on the field exchanged a few more moves. Dai Feng's previously awe-inspiring performance was never seen again as he constantly retreated in defeat.

Dong Luzi roared loudly, the sword's shadow flashed by, breaking through his opponent's flaw, quickly entering the inside of the opponent's sword moves, heading directly towards Dai Feng's chest.

Dai Feng was shocked but was unable to retract his sword in time as he abruptly stumbled backward and barely missed this severe blow.

However Dong Luzi is someone who can be merciless once he gains the upper hand. His feet flew and kicked towards the groin and if not for the armor, this kick would have made Dai Feng a eunuch. Nevertheless, it was enough to give him much pain as he cried out in pain, his hand dropping the long sword as he staggered and tumbled, with his hands gripping his groin.

The crowd did not expect that Dong Luzi, who looks so gentle and refined, can be so ruthless once he has gained the upper hand. They all stared at him shell-shocked and for a moment, the whole field was so silent that one can even hear a pin dropped and only the sound of Dai Feng's moans were heard.

Zhao Ba's face paled as he stood up and shouted, "Isn't anyone helping instructor inside to tend to his wound?"

Instantly, they all scrambled forward to help bring Dai Feng inside.

Dong Luzi didn't look at all regretful; instead he jauntily bowed towards both sides, handed over the wooden sword and returned to his seat.

Zhao Zhi had always had a good friendship with Dai Feng, so she can no longer be bothered with Li Yuan as she glared hatefully at him before quickly following Dai Feng inside.

Li Yuan didn't even care about Zhao Zhi at all as he smiled suavely, "It's hard to avoid injury during a martial arts competition, if Master Zhao is afraid of more accidents happening, let's just stop it all here and let me play host tonight as an apology?"

This time even Ji Yanran could not tolerate what has happened as she quietly cursed, "Li Yuan, you're too overbearing!"

Zhao Ba's huge, round eyes were glaring with murderous intent, obviously he was seriously infuriated. Xiang Shaolong

was really afraid that he will volunteer to enter the fight himself, so he quickly pushed Han Chuang forward.

Han Chuang understood his meaning and made a hand signal towards his own chosen warrior whom he was planning send for the duel to come forward.

That warrior, called Fu Jianyin, obeyed the order and jumped off the stand as he called out, “Fu Jianyin would like Mister Li Yuan to give me some pointers!”

The whole field solemnly waited in silence to see if Li Yuan would personally accept the challenge.

Fu Jianyin’s stature wasn’t tall but he was strong and stout, his face has some crisscross scars. His appearance looked a little bit scary, but this is exactly the ironclad proof that he had fought in many battles.

Li Yuan displayed a condescending attitude as he languidly leaned half his body against the table next to him and said nonchalantly, “Wuxin! Why don’t you go and learn from the expert?”

The crowd had already guessed that he wouldn’t find the opponent to be worth his time, so they weren’t surprised.

The robustly built Lou Wuxin slowly walked down the stand, briefly bowed and straightened himself arrogantly. After accepting the wooden sword, he brushed off the person who was about to put the armor on him, “It’s not even a battlefield, why do we even need this useless thing?”

On seeing that, Fu Jianyin said loudly, "Since Brother Lou is not wearing armor, I'll dispense with it too."

At this time, Lord Longyang stepped in behind Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran and delicately whispered, "In this world, is there anyone more arrogant than the Chus? We don't see such arrogance coming from them when they were facing the Qins. Will Sister Yanran be participating?"

Ji Yanran sighed, "Yanran also find this difficult to accept, but I know that I cannot win against Li Yuan, so there's nothing I can do."

Lord Longyang gave an icy snort and did not speak as he returned to his seat. He knew that he himself would be on par with Ji Yanran, so if even she said that she couldn't beat Li Yuan, there was no way that he could win. At the same time, he decided not to let his chosen Jiaoxu fight so that his man would not be beaten and humiliated.

Zhao Mu turned towards Guo Kai and Le Cheng and sighed, "If Fu Jianyin loses as well, we can only rely on Luo Xiang to redeem our face. Otherwise we'll have to let the Master of the School fight, but I am really reluctant to let this happen."

Guo Kai replied, "Li Yuan is the number one swordsman of Chu. His men are already so formidable, it's not hard to imagine the level of Li Yuan's sword skills."

At the moment, everyone felt helpless.

Even though Zhao Mu was a master swordsman, but due to his status, it's not convenient for him to join the fight as it might create a discord between the two countries.

Li Yuan was lucky that he does not hold any official post, otherwise he would not be allowed to fight others on a personal basis without the orders of his King.

The two fighters on the field shouted out loud simultaneously and violently attacked the other side. Lou Wuxin's sword moves like the wind, sweeping widely and the sword aura is like the mountain, extremely mighty and ferocious. Almost as soon as they made contact, Fu Jianyin fell into the situation of being badgered.

Xiang Shaolong at this moment caught sight of Teng Yi galloping on the horse, passing through the gate, he reached out and pushed Han Chuang on the back, saying "Go and stop this duel quickly!"

Han Chuang looked like he was in a dilemma because this Fu Jianyin was passed off as a Zhao to enter the fight. If he says anything, wouldn't it be obvious that Fu Jianyin is actually his man.

Both sides were watching the fight quietly, it wasn't like before where everyone was screaming their support, the tension was as tight as a drawn bowstring.

Right when Han Chuang was still hesitating, the winner emerged.

Fu Jianyin lost in strength, as he stumbled slightly, Lou Wuxin swept towards his shoulder with the sword and the sound of bone breaking could be heard. As he groaned in pain, Fu Jianyin tumbled forward, and when he got back on his feet, the pain is already causing his face to be wet with cold sweat.

Lou Wuxin laughed out loud, "Thank you for giving way!"

Xiang Shaolong gestured towards Teng Yi who was walking towards them after getting off the horse. The latter understood his intention and shouted loudly from the distance, "I'm Long Shan, Dong Kuang's family warriors. This brother looks very familiar, would you mind giving me a few instruction?"

The crowd at this time can't be bothered to find out how Fu Jianyin was being carried out, neither did they notice that Zhao Zhi has just returned to the field and was seated amongst her senior and junior brothers, they were all focused on sizing up this uninvited warrior.

Lou Wuxin looked Teng Yi up and down disdainfully and coldly replied, "If you want to fight, you have to use real swords to able to display real skills."

Teng Yi laughed, "Why not? But Mister Li better send another fighter for me to tire me out a little bit before we can fight or so that it'll be fair when I fight with you."

Zhao Mu sighed, "Is your family warrior a moron, he didn't even know how to take advantage of the situation?"

Ji Yanran smiled, "A Master will have a servant who behaves like him, and this is what a true hero is about."

Zhao Mu couldn't help but give an embarrassed laugh, angry at himself for showing that he is not a hero at all.

Li Yuan was afraid that Lou Wuxin didn't have time to regain his breath yet and when he saw that at Xiang Shaolong did not show any reaction, happily said, "Definitely hero material!"

He made a gesture and one of the warriors behind him whose face looked like an ancient copper obeyed his order and stepped out.

Xiang Shaolong turned towards Ji Yanran, "Who's this person?"

Under the crowd's expectant gaze, Ji Yanran shook her head bewilderedly.

That person came in front of Teng Yi, and very calmly said, "I don't like to use fake swords too, what is your opinion?"

Teng Yi frostily replied, "Brother, how may I address you?"

That person calmly replied, "My name is Yanfu, I am just a nobody!"

Once everyone heard, not one of them didn't get stirred.

Xiang Shaolong of course didn't know who he is, his questioning gaze turned towards Ji Yanran for clarification.

Ji Yanran looked solemn as she replied, "He was originally a famous swordsman from Qin but ran away to Chu because

he killed someone. I did not expect him to join Li Yuan. From this, it could be seen that Li Yuan's influence in Chu is growing by leaps and bounds, no wonder he is so arrogant."

Han Chuang and the rest started to worry for Teng Yi.

"Clang!"

Yanfu pulled out his glimmering sharp sword, fell back two steps, pointed at Teng Yi and shouted, "Still haven't pulled out your sword yet?"

Teng Yi was expressionless but a coldness radiated from his eyes as he unhurriedly said, "When the time comes, the sword will naturally be pulled out of its sheath!"

Yanfu was furious as he roared, straighten up the sword and attacked.

Instantly, a cold glare flared, blinding everyone's eyes.

No one could have expected that the friendly competition between influential officials could turn into a real life and death fight.

CHAPTER 3
Awe-Inspiring At The Field
[Translated by SLYPHIAD]

ONCE Yanfu attacked with his sword, everyone could tell he was formidable. No matter the angle or the speed, technique or footwork, all these can be clearly seen in this simple looking sword execution that was moving like a swimming dragon, indeed deserving of his great reputation as a master swordsman.

The most exhilarating part was he borrowed the twisting power of his waist and legs to exert his moving strength, creating a powerful stab that pooled the energy in his whole

body, moving as fast as lightning, with no warning sign in advance. It was really instantaneous, seemingly like a volcanic eruption and in the blink of an eye, the sword point arrived only a foot away from the unmoving Teng Yi's chest.

The crowd imagined themselves in Teng Yi's position. At the moment, the only path left was to retreat and pull out his sword, but this would only boost the opponent's dominance. The offensive attacks will come in waves and he may even perish under the sword. In other words, whatever happens, it's only because Teng Yi's did not draw out his sword first and thus lost his chance to act first.

A small smile escaped from the corner of Teng Yi's lips as he swiftly drew out his sword without even retreating a step.

The crowd was secretly alarmed. Guo Xiu'er and Zhao Ya were so scared. They shut their pretty eyes, unable to bear watching the tragic outcome of this hero when he spills his blood.

"Clang!"

While everyone was stupefied, Teng Yi drew out his sword to about two feet from the sheath and actually accurately blocked the edge of Yanfu's sword with his sword handle.

Even if Yanfu was stronger than Teng Yi, but the power emitted from the sword's edge is incomparable to the power emitted from the flat side of the sword handle. Especially since Yanfu's arm strength simply wasn't on the same level as Teng Yi.

Ever since Yanfu started to appear in the pugilistic world, he has never seen anyone who from the start could beat an enemy using the sword handle only. He had placed his full power to attack forward, and he could not stop his momentum and was heading towards Teng Yi as if he is throwing himself into his embrace.

Just as he realized his mistake, Teng Yi's iron fist loomed in front of his eyes.

"Bang!"

Fresh blood spurted from Yanfu's mouth and nose as he stumbled backwards, unexpectedly knocked out by Teng Yi's left fist, whereas Teng Yi's sword was only half out of the sheath.

"Clang!"

The sword slid back into the sheath.

Silence reigned on the field, before the swordsmen from the training school burst into loud cheers which filled the whole field, amazed by Teng Yi's skills and also ecstatic because he had gotten revenge on their behalf.

Li Yuan did not expect Teng Yi's skill is as high as this, his face turned green as he shouted, "Carry that useless guy out!"

Once this word was out, even Zhao Ya, who was sitting beside him furrowed her brows, could feel that this person, Li Yuan, is an unkind and fickle person, showing no sympathy at all towards a subordinate who has failed.

Yanfu was quickly carried out of the field.

Teng Yi pointed towards Lou Wuxin, "It's your turn now!"

The crowd's eyes all fell on Lou Wuxin, waiting to see if he dared to accept the challenge.

Xiang Shaolong is the only one in the field who can predict the result of the fight. After Teng Yi received his instruction from the 'Mohist Swordplay's Addendum', his sword and martial art skills improved exponentially, even he himself couldn't be sure to win against him, much less Yanfu. This time he laughed out loud, "Brother Lou, if you still have not rested enough to get your breath back, we can ask Brother Dong Luzi or others to fight first."

Once this was said, there was no way for Lou Wuxin to avoid this any further, he stood up, snorted and walked out towards the field.

Everyone immediately quieted down.

Ji Yanran whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ear, "I have never seen anyone with such queer sword skills as your Second Brother, he not any more inferior compared to Li Yuan."

Zhao Mu was instead elated, secretly thinking that it's no wonder that this 'Horse Fanatic' is so boastful, so it turns out that he has a subordinate who can fight against a hundred fighters singlehandedly with his out of the world sword skills.

"Clang!"

Lou Wuxin pulled out his sword and assumed a stance, yet he didn't immediately attack, quietly studying his opponent's sword movement and techniques. Teng Yi faced the sky and laughed aloud, his right hand holding the sword handle, stepped forward and looked as if he was going to pull out his sword.

Lou Wuxin felt awestricken by his imposing manner and actually took a step back, so that a gap of seven to eight steps still remained between them. Teng Yi dashed like lightning forward towards Lou Wuxin's left side, the long sword slid back in and then out of the sheath again, creating the unbelievable illusion of countless seemingly real sword sparks, looking like an attack but yet not an attack, and poisonous snakes in a pit, rearing their heads and sticking out their tongue so that at any time. It could fiercely attack its enemy with one bite, but it would definitely be a merciless killing move.

Xiang Shaolong slapped his thigh and cheered. This move that Teng Yi used was based on defending in order to attack, beyond doubt that it has reached perfection, completely utilizing the essence of Mohist Swordplay's Addendum.

Lou Wuxin was completely baffled by the opponent's sword movement, even though he shouted and assumed a fierce posture but in the end he still moved back a step, everyone could see that he had been intimidated.

When master swordsmen were pitted in a battle against each other, how can one constantly retreat.

With wondrous instinct, Teng Yi's sword suddenly moved widely, changing from defending to attack into attacking to defend, waving his long sword seemingly like a rainbow, accompanied by refined and intricate footwork, dashing forward to Lou Wuxin's left, taking him by storm.

"Clang!"

Lou Wuxin strenuously tried to block Teng Yi's sword, which has reached perfection regardless of technique, posture, strength or movement.

Teng Yi sneered, "Is this all you have?"

The long sword slid out, and quickly morphed into a sweep.

"Clang!"

Lou Wuxin raised his sword in trepidation to block, only to be swept away by Teng Yi and there was no way he could retaliate at all.

Not one of them from Li Yuan's side that didn't turn pale, for it must be known that Lou Wuxin's arm strength is the best amongst them all but it turned out that this "Long Shan" can easily beat him.

By this time, everyone knew that Teng Yi plans to subdue and humiliate this person in terms of strength.

Zhao Ba was ecstatic, but also secretly alarmed. He was always self-assured that his strength was unbeatable, but now looking at Teng Yi's might, he realizes that there will always be others who are better.

Le Cheng who was sitting at the back moved forward, "Your family warrior's superhuman strength was just astonishing. I won't be surprised if it's comparable to Xiao Weimou."

Xiao Shaolong secretly snickered, if Le Cheng knew that Xiao Weimou was killed by Teng Yi, who knows what would he think about it?

History is being repeated again. Earlier, it was Fu Jianyin who was beaten senseless by Lou Wuxin till he cannot retaliate at all and ultimately lost. This time, it's Teng Yi slowly pressing forward, making Lou Wuxin sweat with effort, continuously retreating.

This Lou Wuxin can be considered as awesome as he could ward off Teng Yi's unfathomable 25th sword stance before he lapsed and thus creating a flaw in his defense.

Teng Yi moved forward like a lightning kicking his lower abdomen.

Lou Wuxin scrambled backward holding the sword, curled up on the floor from the pain. Besides moaning, he had no more energy to get up anymore.

The crowd was awestruck by this terrible sword move that all have forgotten to cheer.

Li Yuan completely lost face. After ordering someone to move Lou Wuxin, he saw that everyone and that Long Shan's eyes are on him, he secretly groaned. If he joined in the fight, even though he might not necessarily lose, he didn't have the confidence to get the upper hand, but at this time

the situation is such that there's no other way out so he snorted, "So Mister Dong has such a skillful subordinate. From this we could infer that Mister must also be an expert. Why don't we use this time to play a little bit, so as to avoid others speaking badly of me for taking advantage of your subordinate when he is tired from all the fighting."

Even though his words sounded reasonable, but everyone knew that he is in fact extremely wary of Teng Yi.

Xiang Shaolong waved to Teng Yi to come back to the stand, before standing up slowly and replying calmly, "Regarding my skills, Brother Li should already have a clear understanding from your family warriors, but how can listening be compared to watching. Since Brother Li is in a mood to play, I would of course love to accompany you."

Li Yuan did not expect that he'd be willing to fight, and his joy plummeted.

This time, besides the men on Li Yuan's side and Teng Yi, everyone else was worried for Xiang Shaolong. Li Yuan is known as Chu's number one famous swordsman, just by looking at Lou Wuxin and the others' skills, they can all deduce his formidability. Dong Kuang, this 'Horse Fanatic', wasn't well known for his sword skills, so it's not too hard to imagine who'll win or lose.

Ji Yanran was anxious to the point where her brows all furrowed together. If Xiang Shaolong lost, even though Li Yuan wouldn't dare to publicly kill him, but he will definitely injure or maim him.

Xiang Shaolong took off his precious sword Blood Wave and gave it to the person beside him as he smiled at Li Yuan, "How can we follow these youngsters and compete with our lives. We can dispense with the armor, but we will still use wooden swords to exchange pointers and hold our strength in check. All should be carried out in the spirit of a friendly competition."

Even though Li Yuan was reluctant, he couldn't openly show his desire to kill his opponent, so he smiled calmly, "Since this is Mister Dong's suggestion, I will naturally agree."

Xiang Shaolong secretly grinned, he is someone who's used to using wooden sword. Just on this point alone, Li Yuan is destined to lose. After accepting the wooden sword and testing the weight, despite it only weighing about 70% of his Mohist sword, it's still much heavier than the average iron sword.

Li Yuan used both hands to wave the sword around, pondering if he could just blind the other party in one eye, it would be most ideal.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly shouted, "Master Zhao, let's play some drums to add to the atmosphere!"

While everyone was stunned, the drummer responsible for this had already started drumming like a violent rain producing earth-shaking drumming sounds.

Li Yuan's handsome face turned cold and ruthless as he held his sword and stood erect. With his tall and graceful stature,

and suave appearance, he truly had an extraordinary posture.

Xiang Shaolong placed his sword in front of him, staying as still as a mountain, both eyes shining sharply like eagle, focusing on the opponent.

The both of them stood facing each other, immediately revealing the air of an expert. Everyone was filled with tension, anticipating the coming storm, for that moment everything was silent.

After spending the past six months training intensely, Xiang Shaolong has changed from being blindingly brilliant to being calmly unwavering, even someone like Zhao Mu and the rest who had seen him fight several times in the past couldn't link through his movement that he is the Xiang Shaolong of the past.

Ji Yanran is an expert swordsman, with just a glance she can see that Xiang Shaolong's casual stand has the aura of an immovable mountain. She was inwardly surprised, could it be that the last time they fought, he didn't fight with all his might? She could never have guessed that his improvement in swordplay was all due to finding the Mohist Swordplay's Addendum.

In Zhao Zhi's eyes now, there is only Dong the Horse Fanatic who has that natural, graceful bearing of a hero, to the extent that even the handsome looking Li Yuan seems to pale on comparison.

Zhao Ya looked at Li Yuan, and also looked at Xiang Shaolong. She felt that although both parties had their own powerfully attractive qualities, Xiang Shaolong's uniquely alluring enigmatic and mysterious quality is something that Li Yuan cannot give.

Guo Xiu'er felt something altogether different.

Li Yuan was truly the ideal husband of her dreams, talented in both literature and martial arts. He is dignified and graceful, at the same time he has status and power. Despite knowing that he's a playboy, but that's the way of all men, so she could only resign herself to this fate and obey her father's command to marry this Lord.

But the appearance of Dong Kuang allowed her to experience the lure of another type of man, unrefined and straightforward yet revealing a thrilling wisdom and extraordinary thinking, making her willing to be conquered by him. This dilemma of choosing between them is making this young girl's heart disconcerted, unable to make a choice.

Now that the both of them are finally competing to decide their superiority, would it help her make a decision? During this warring period, everyone knows martial art, sword skills has long become the standard in judging someone's skills. An expert swordsman will naturally be regarded as important and admired.

Li Yuan and Xiang Shaolong stared at each other unwaveringly, and said in a frosty manner, "Brother Dong's

horse rearing skills are unparalleled in this world. I really would like to see whether Brother Dong's sword skill is comparable to your horse rearing skills."

He lowered his body to assume a stance, waving the sword and pointing at Xiang Shaolong, repeatedly shaking.

Everyone in the audience broke out into cold sweat on Xiang Shaolong's behalf, no one had expected that Li Yuan's sword skills to have reached such high levels. Even when using the wooden sword, he's still able to create ingenious changes, confusing the audience to the point where one can't be sure where the attack will be coming from.

Xiang Shaolong was still standing stiff like a pillar, the corner of his mouth revealed a mysterious smile as he blandly replied, "What are you waiting for, Brother Li?"

His words were imbued with strong confidence, everyone can clearly feel that he's not even a little bit intimidated.

Li Yuan definitely proved himself to be worthy of being Chu's number one swordsman, he wasn't at all provoked by these words. He smiled and swiftly attacked.

When Xiang Shaolong raised his wooden sword, pointing at him diagonally, he retreated and returned to his previous position when they were facing each other, the distance between them totally remaining unchanged. It can be seen from this how precise Li Yuan's footwork was. Just based on this point, Ji Yanran's earlier conclusion that Li Yuan's sword skills were above Xiang Shaolong was definitely not without evidence.

Zhao Zhi was thinking that if Xiang Shaolong's sword skills is on par with that Long Shan, these two people together would be enough to carry out the secret task of assassinating anyone. She can't help but feel resentful towards Xiang Shaolong's heartlessness.

Teng Yi concentrated on watching both of them, with their swords drawn and poised to attack. He was originally confident that Xiang Shaolong would undoubtedly win, but when he saw Li Yuan's expertise when testing the water and his intricate and harmonized footwork, he couldn't help feeling a little bit worried.

On the contrary, the one with the most confidence was Xiang Shaolong himself, not because he was underestimating his enemy, but because he had entered the state of Mohism protection. A state where there are no others and no self, yet at the same time his opponent's intent cannot escape his observation at all.

He knew that Li Yuan is luring him into attacking first, but he was totally unmoved. If both sides are not striking at all, the one who will lose face wouldn't be this 'Horse Fanatic' but the arrogant Li Yuan who had made his boast earlier.

While training in the 21st century, they really focused on the psychology of warfare and he is currently applying what he has learnt, intending to strike at Li Yuan's weak points based on his character.

After facing each other for awhile, sure enough, Li Yuan couldn't endure any loss of face and got impatient. He gave

a cold snort, single-handedly lifted his sword overhead and leapt forward. As the long sword was about to violently strike Xiang Shaolong, his left hand grabbed the sword handle as well, and the power was intensified as now he is wielding the sword with both hands instead.

Even though many disdained Li Yuan, but on seeing this outstanding move, everyone can't help but be impressed. Furthermore, this move was extremely severe and violent, gathering the power in the whole body's strength to the arms. If Xiang Shaolong raised his sword with one hand to block, then it very possible that this single move will determine the winner.

Xiang Shaolong still looked as calm as still water. He only raised his brows, turned his wrist, and actually used only one hand to block Li Yuan's move.

Ji Yanran was so astonished that her heart was beating rapidly, her slender hands rose to cover her gasping mouth that was about to scream.

In the past, she had fought both of them separately so she naturally understood that their arm strength were comparable. But this time Li Yuan is using both hands to attack and he has the added power from the running momentum so it's not hard to know who would be stronger.

Ai! How can Xiang Shaolong be so reckless?

Everyone there can only hear the swooshing of Li Yuan's sword cutting thru the air and could tell the ferocious power

behind it, all couldn't bear to see the happening of another tragic ending.

Li Yuan saw Xiang Shaolong trying to block with a single hand and was secretly happy so he intensified his strength into the strike.

Who knew Xiang Shaolong could suddenly change from blocking horizontally to flicking his sword up, heavily pushing aside his opponent's move that was bearing down on him with the weight of a mountain. The hard block changed into deflecting the enemy's blow using its own momentum.

Li Yuan watched helplessly as a surefire move was deflected to the side by Xiang Shaolong, and it went off target a little to only chop down towards the empty spot where Xiang Shaolong's left shoulder used to be.

Cheers reverberated around the field.

Even Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi, these two beautiful ladies who hated Xiang Shaolong, enthusiastically clapped their hands and cheered. Luckily, this time Li Yuan cannot afford to be distracted, or else he would have died of anger.

Everyone thought that Xiang Shaolong will take this advantage to attack first. Who would have guessed that he would instead move back a step? His wooden sword moving in a bizarre and mysterious path, moving backwards and forward in front of his body, floating and waving around randomly.

Even with Li Yuan's sword skills and experience, he still cannot determine which moves are true and which are fake. With no alternative, he was forced to retreat but tried to look as if he is arranging a forbidding defense. However he is not as commanding now as he was before.

Teng Yi felt relieved, knowing that Xiang Shaolong had guessed correctly about Li Yuan's thinking to impress Ji Yanran with his martial prowess. He knew Xiang Shaolong purposely made Li Yuan lose face, provoking him into being more impatient and reckless so that he'll lose his advantage. He's truly brilliant in strategy.

Ji Yanran is no longer worried about her lover, her eyes were shining with love and affection, looking at Xiang Shaolong's vigorous body emitting an imposing aura and charm.

The autumn sun was shining high above the sky upon the field filling it with life.

There's another person who cannot 'refrain himself from liking' Xiang Shaolong, which is Lord Long Yang. From the first moment he saw this stout and forthright man, 'his' heart was stirred. Now that he witnessed his splendid sword performance, his heart was sent into disorder and he was secretly determined to captivate Xiang Shaolong into becoming his love slave.

On the other hand, those family warriors under Li Yuan were so astounded they remained silent, they couldn't believe that even with Li Yuan's amazing sword skills, he still couldn't even get a little bit of upper hand.

Li Yuan forced himself to concentrate, the wooden sword slashed up and down, forming his second attack.

Xiang Shaolong returned to his original spot, standing still like the mountain, not even moving a little bit.

Now, no one would think that he was too self assured and belittled his opponent.

Li Yuan softly said, "Who would have thought that Brother Dong is such an expert, be careful!"

With a diagonal forward attack, he moved around towards Xiang Shaolong's back in an instant.

Not only did Xiang Shaolong not turn around to receive the attack, instead he quickly moved forward towards Li Yuan's last position before turning around, the wooden sword pointing at the opponent. His steps steady and his bearing confident, with the posture like an erect mountain. One look is all it takes to know that he did not flounder at all despite his enemy's tactical attack.

Li Yuan missed his intent and landed at Xiang Shaolong's original spot and it seemed like the two of them made an agreement to exchange places.

The spectators didn't dare to take a breath, afraid that it might influence both parties who are caught in a deadlock.

Xiang Shaolong wasn't without his own difficulties, for it is hard for him to go all out and fight. If he did not rein himself, it would be difficult to conceal his moves and it may even trigger the memory of those who have seen him fight in the

past. By then, even if he killed Li Yuan, the loss will still outweigh the gain.

Li Yuan saw that both his moves has failed and lost his patience. He waved his sword to attack again. The sword point trembled like lightning, relentless, ruthless and flawless.

Xiang Shaolong knew that he was anxious for victory and was secretly delighted. Just before the sword touched his body, he coolly deflected to the side. The move was truly as calm as an immovable object yet as swift as an escaping rabbit. Besides, his movement was suave and unrestrained as well, thus attracting the cheers of others.

Li Yuan saw that he was evading the attack and happily thought there was hope. He shouted and waved the sword quickly.

Xiang Shaolong laughed aloud, drawing out his wooden in a flash, turned around and flew forward, continuously blocking the opponent's five strikes without retreating a single step. His defense was as solid as an iron bucket, while his every move contained possible hidden changes thus causing Li Yuan to be hesitant about advancing rashly.

The clash of the wooden swords rang continuously non-stop.

The crowd was so focused on the fight that they forgot to cheer for their own side, only seeing both parties' sword skills soaring powerfully without constraints, fluttering and flashing indefinitely. Not only were they marveling at Li

Yuan's unparalleled moves, but also astonished at Xiang Shaolong's unfathomable moves.

Zhao Ya felt that this Horse Fanatic is just like his character, unfathomable. Judging from his appearance, anyone would have guessed that Xiang Shaolong is a proactive person and who would have thought that in actuality it was the other way around.

Even though Li Yuan is always the initiator of the attacks, yet his opponent's defensive yet seemingly offensive moves is restricting him the use of the full strength of his skills. At the same time, the opponent displayed a strong will and tenacious power and he cannot help but feel discouraged. This is also the negative after effect of his two failed attacks; otherwise he wouldn't have this feeling of discouragement.

His sixth attacks haven't come out and yet the opponent's wooden sword suddenly created numerous shadows, confusing him such that he has no idea where the attack will be coming from. Li Yuan was alarmed and naturally he retreated.

Xiang Shaolong laughed out loud, placing the flat side of the wooden sword on his shoulder, appearing calm and composed, said to Li Yuan who has retreated close to ten steps away from him, "Brother Li's sword skills are indeed ingenious. I think that it will be extremely difficult for me to win, let's just quit while we're ahead and call off the battle at this point, what do you think, Brother Li?"

Li Yuan stood frozen on the field; his handsome face flitted between turning red and pale. Even though it was still not clear who will be the winner and the loser, but everyone saw that all of his three attacks were nullified by this Horse Fanatic, how can he lift his face up again?

But if he insists on continuing the fight, firstly, it will show his lack of bearing, even more importantly, he had lost his confidence and all of his fighting spirit had been dispelled.

While he was still hesitating, Guo Kai, who was worried that Xiang Shaolong will really injure Li Yuan, stood up, "Let's consider this fight is a draw. Today is indeed an eye opening experience for all of us."

Li Yuan secretly hated this but he had to maintain a smiling front, accepting other people's congratulations together with Xiang Shaolong.

Ji Yanran greeted Xiang Shaolong and said tenderly, "Mister Dong, from today onwards, you can be considered equally brilliant in both horse rearing and sword skills. I wonder if you would be willing to visit the place where I'm putting up for the moment to see my sick horse."

Everyone who heard this envied him. Although she's using to the horse as an excuse, but her invitation came publicly after his incredible performance of martial prowess so everyone knew that this peerless beauty known for her heart of stone is no longer concealing her feelings towards this Horse Fanatic whom had stirred her heart.

The other three girls, who were rushing to congratulate Xiang Shaolong, felt snubbed as Ji Yanran snatched their chances and quietly withdrew.

Li Yuan was the one who felt the worst. Originally he thought that today he would be able to impress everyone during the martial arts competition, instead he ended up with two of his famous subordinates seriously injured, while he himself could not win the fight, which is a total loss of face. The hardest hit was Ji Yanran is actually making giving an invitation to his biggest rival right in front of his eyes. His felt a strong hatred and hurriedly left with his subordinates.

Zhao Ba was ecstatic and said as he pulled Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi, "No matter what, I want to invite both of you to become our honored guest instructors. Please do not decline!"

Zhao Mu sighed, "If Mister Dong and Brother Long was here a year earlier, that fellow Xiang Shaolong would not be able to leave Handan alive."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged glances, both felt very amused.

Amongst all the uproars, Xiang Shaolong finally was able to extricate himself to leave with Ji Yanran under everyone's admiration gaze.

CHAPTER 4

Isolated Without Support

[Translated by SLYPHIAD & JUSTIN13]

JI YANRAN, accompanied by Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi on her right and left, galloped out of the school.

As Xiang Shaolong remembered Zhao Ba's invitation for them to become the honored guest instructors, he couldn't help be reminded that Lian Jin must have received the same treatment when he was alive, therefore he had the opportunity to become closer to Zhao Zhi thus evoking their short affair.

Maybe Zhao Zhi is fickle in love, for her first lover was killed and she instead fell in love with him, the person who killed her lover, but because of her relationship with Jing Jun, he didn't dare to accept her love. However, if she threw herself into Li Yuan's embrace out of anger because of this, it could really make one feel resentful.

Li Yuan will definitely not appreciate or care for the fairer sex for he is too selfish.

Returning to the busy town centre, Teng Yi said, "I want to go to the Hidden Army Valley to see them, I may not be able to return by tonight."

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement, replied offhandedly, "Have you sent someone to see 'Father'?"

'Father' was Lu Buwei's codename.

Teng Yi replied, "Sent the day before!"

After requesting leave of Ji Yanran, he rode towards the city gate direction. They have been granted the Pass Document so they could leave the city at anytime without any problem.

Ji Yanran begged, "I want you to stroll around town with me, will you agree?"

Xiang Shaolong joyfully agreed and they rode back to his residence first, before going out to leisurely stroll around town.

After walking for only a while and Ji Yanran couldn't take it anymore because every one on the street were staring at them

in surprise, making her feel uncomfortable, so she had no choice but to drag Xiang Shaolong and slipped back into the borrowed residence she's currently residing in.

The owner, a great Confucian Scholar in Handan, Liu Huasheng was playing chess with Zou Yan and when the two of them returned, they were delighted.

Liu Huasheng and Zou Yan were old friends who had known each other for thirty more years and they treated Ji Yanran like their own daughter and everyone was talking joyfully.

So far, Zou Yan hadn't gotten a chance yet to speak of old times with Xiang Shaolong. He urged Ji Yanran to take his place playing chess, while he and Xiang Shaolong walked together into the quiet and secluded back garden, and sighed, "Since the Prince of Ping moved to the east, it's been more than 500 years where there's no true leader. There had been continuous wars, and who else but the common people suffered, luckily, we now have you as the new Saint to become our hope of ever stopping these wars."

Xiang Shaolong wouldn't dare to underestimate this wise 'Five Elements' School founder, because truly without him Xiang Shaolong, Emperor Qin who united the six countries wouldn't exist. But he still didn't know how to answer his question, the only way left was just to stay quiet.

Zou Yan was intoxicated inside his own vision of vast and broad history and softly said, "I know Shaolong is someone who pursues peace, but true peace can only be achieved through war, there's no other way beside this. Otherwise

with these seven states continuously fighting, sooner or later, we'll be attacked from the tribes in the northwest who are watching intently for the right opportunity to invade the mainland like locusts coming to destroy our civilization."

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly startled, Zou Yan's words were like a blow to his head, getting him to think of problems he didn't think of before. All along, he had deliberately avoided having a hand in any wars; however, he never thought that it'd be better to suffer momentarily than to suffer long-term pain, employing war as a way to bring peace. This was mainly because of his foreigner mentality.

But this problem is in fact his problem now as he had become a member of this era so naturally he have to accept the responsibility that comes with staying in this time period.

Even if Qin didn't dispatch soldiers to go on an expedition, the other six states also won't let Qin off, this is basically a time period where the strongest rules.

Instead of allowing the flames of war to reign free indefinitely to the point of flashing an open invitation for the outside tribes to invade, it'd be better to use the Qins' might to unite the whole country earlier. If he leads the army, at the very least, he can reduce the senseless massacre to the bare minimum thus reducing the burden of war on the people.

Once he reached this conclusion, his heart stirred to passion.

Zou Yan measured him with rapt attention for a while before grinning, "The universe undergoes thousands of changes constantly, but is always connected to the activities of the five elements, gold, wood, water, fire and earth. The heaven is five elements, people are also five elements. Even though from outward appearance the usage is always full of changes, on the inside the essence stays the same. If heaven and people are always interconnected, every time there's a rising energy, when both of them are taking turns, an auspicious omen can be seen. Wherever auspicious omen is, that is where the master of the new time period is. For example, the time of King Zhouwen, there was a red crow holding a red book in its beak which flew down to the sacrificial altar, signifying the time for them to develop the unification plan."

Xiang Shaolong couldn't help himself asking, "So where is the auspicious omen now?"

Zou Yan joyfully replied, "Did you remember that I once mentioned to you the appearance of a new star? Half a year ago, Shaolong left Zhao and went towards Qin, that star immediately vanished. Just when I was confused, I saw on the sky where the position of Qin is, a bigger and brighter new star appeared, glowing in the night sky. Now I am positive that the one who will unify the whole country must be a Qin and will have a direct relation to you."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned speechless, with this he can no longer underestimate the authority of this ancient astrologer.

Zou Yan extended his hand and placed it on his shoulder, saying sincerely, "For the sake of the well being of the people in the whole world, Shaolong, you must accelerate the Qins unification plan or else the fate of the new star might suddenly become gloomier. Do not worry about how others will see you, as long as you grab tightly to your ideals and do your best, you wouldn't disappoint the expectations placed on you by Heaven. The unification plan must start with you and this is something I am very sure of."

Xiang Shaolong's heart was stirred, only now did he understand how open Zou Yan's heart is, filled with passion and love for the universe and mankind.

His opinion is aimed at the current actual situation, unlike Confucius and Mencius who could only talk about virtue and morality, while hard reality pointed out that near expiring State of Lu can only perish.

During this warring period, the only way to fight violence was with violence.

Zou Yan continued, "Yanran always had this idea, she wish she can support a brilliant leader to unify the whole country and stop the war."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled in his heart, the path to attaining this goal is very long and arduous, but without Great Qin, it would not be possible for the following period of the two Han Dynasties to have peace, even more so for China to exists in the 21st century. When he thought of this,

he abruptly resolved to cast aside his own moral principles and see if he can help Xiao Pan a little.

At the same time, he secretly sighed. For someone like him who views all wars are evil, it wasn't easy for him to suddenly change his ideology.

Right at this moment, Ji Yanran and Liu Huasheng came out side by side.

Zou Yan laughed, "How did it go?"

Ji Yanran blushed, "Scholar Liu saw that I am not in the mood for war so he let me off this time!"

Everyone laughed.

That Liu Huasheng didn't know Xiang Shaolong background and only regarded him as horse fanatic Dong Kuang. After some small talk, he and Zou Yan went back inside to continue contending for supremacy on the chessboard while Ji Yanran happily led Xiang Shaolong towards small building she's temporary residing in.

Two beautiful servant-girls opened the gate and welcomed them in. Xiang Shaolong recognized them and suddenly felt a surge of familiarity.

Ji Yanran took him upstairs to her room. After waving away her maid, she sat on his lap and gave him a scorching kiss.

Both of them felt like they were transported to another world.

Yanran pretended to be solemn and asked, "Brother Dong! May I dare to ask when will you officially take Yanran as your wife?"

Xiang Shaolong grinned, "Since Miss Ji is asking this question, hmm, let me inspect you first to see if you are good stuff!"

He extended his hand and start stroking her bosom.

Ji Yanran melted into his embrace, but still stubbornly asked, "I am being serious now. When I can't see you, that longing feeling is truly tormenting for me."

Xiang Shaolong felt deeply touched by her love for him, sighed, "If everyone knows that I have won you over and even sleeping together with you, it'll be difficult for me to move around. By that time, everyone will pay attention to us even you surely will lose your position and status as a detached girl free from all manly and womanly lust. This will be detrimental towards my operation here in Handan."

These few days, Ji Yanran has fallen head over heels in love and has forgotten everything else. Now that Xiang Shaolong has reminded her, she pondered and nodded, "Yanran's too reckless, forgetting that you are in a dangerous situation, I understand now!"

After a short discussion, the two of them reluctantly parted.

Xiang Shaolong leisurely walked back to his residence instead of riding.

Wu Guo interrupted him at the entrance, "Lady Ya and Miss Zhi are both waiting for you. I brought both of them separately to the east and west room respectively."

Xiang Shaolong felt a headache coming as soon as he heard this. He hasn't even gotten any headway for his proper work, instead he got himself entangled with relationship problems and he couldn't help but feel discouraged by this. After considering for a minute, he decided to see Zhao Zhi first.

When he entered the west room, Zhao Zhi was well-behaved and quietly sitting in the corner staring blankly. She looked down as she heard the footsteps, not sure if it means that she's still annoyed at him, or because she felt ashamed that he saw her allowing Li Yuan to be frivolous with her.

Xiang Shaolong sat down beside her, "Miss Zhi, don't you have to accompany Li Yuan?"

Zhao Zhi paled and bit her lips, not answering the question at all as she replied, "Teacher asked me to invite you to our school."

Xiang Shaolong understood that she is just using this as an excuse to come see him, otherwise why would Zhao Ba task a beautiful girl like her to come alone to invite him for it just doesn't conform with the etiquette. He sighed, "How are you these last two days? Now, my heart is very troubled."

Zhao Zhi still looked down, whispered like a fly, "What are you troubled about? You have just flaunted your abilities

today and also won the talented Lady Ji's favor. I thought you won't be home so early."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood her intention for coming here looking for him. She wanted to show him that she didn't give in to Li Yuan. Coming from such a proud and arrogant beautiful girl, this is already a large concession. It can also be seen that this girl had fallen hard for him to the point of losing her self-control.

Zhao Zhi slowly lifted her head, sadly watching him, "You can do whatever you like to me, hit me, scold me, because it's Zhao Zhi's fault."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, when a beautiful girl is willing to allow him to punish her, it's an equivalent to allowing her husband free reign to handle her. If he still rejected her, there's no other way for her to redeem her pride besides suicide. He couldn't help getting a headache and stood up.

Zhao Zhi watched him in trepidation.

Xiang Shaolong said, "Miss Zhi, just sit here first. I will be back with you right away."

He hurried over to the east room.

Zhao Ya was leaning on the window blankly watching the garden outside. Under the evening sun, the flowers and trees gave out a thick autumn feeling.

Hearing his footsteps, Zhao Ya trembled slightly, turned around and smiled, "Talented Lady Ji did not invite you to spend the night?"

Xiang Shaolong snorted, "Did you think her a wanton girl? I didn't even have the chance to touch her little finger."

Zhao Ya knew that he taking the opportunity to blow this up and being sarcastic that she's making herself easy for Li Yuan. She looked down in shame and sighed, "I come here now to apologize to you. Will Mister accept my apology?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, he really shouldn't have fought today. During this period where they value martial prowess over literature, there are no beautiful girls who won't admire heroes with superb sword skills. Just because he wanted to gain a momentary pleasure and although he put managed Li Yuan down a little, he also made two girls fall head over heels over him and now he's at a loss as to how to handle them.

At the moment where there is a lot of urgent business for him to handle, he didn't have any more free time to cope with them two.

Zhao Zhi's much easier to handle, Zhao Ya on the other hand gives him a headache and he is in a dilemma.

The biggest problem was that he himself still held a residue of love towards Zhao Ya and still crazy about her arousing body, so it's easy for him to feel jealousy and resentment towards her. On the whole, Zhao Ya's not a bad person, it's just that she does not have a strong will. But it's impossible

to forgive her, besides he didn't dare to trust her anymore, it's just that sometimes he doesn't have the heart to hurt her excessively.

He exclaimed, "Don't joke with me, Lady. You have never offended me the slightest bit so there's no need to apologize at all."

Zhao Ya gracefully walked over towards him till her chest was nearly touching him, before gazing up tenderly, "Can Zhao Ya stay here tonight?"

Watching her lips spew out these luring words, breathing in her orchid-like scent, he felt like he was brought back to the happier days when they were still delightfully entangled and for a moment, he forgot where he was.

Zhao Ya saw his indecisive expression and moved half a step forward, throwing her slender body into his embrace, her soft perky bosom pressing tightly against him and enchantingly asked, "Do you really disdain me, Mister?"

Xiang Shaolong was shaken awake, secretly relieved that he had applied the sap from the Love Plant, otherwise Zhao Ya might have recognized him. He reached out and grabbed her shoulder. With strong willpower, he hardened his heart and pushed her away a little to avoid being tempted by her enticingly soft breast.

His eyes sharp, he laughed, "Why would Lady have such a thought? Any normal man would not have let you go."

Zhao Ya bashfully replied, "What are you waiting for then?"

Looking at her laying out the obvious, a look of wantonness which hinted that he can do anything to her, Xiang Shaolong was tempted but also angered. His eyes wantonly roved over her beautiful, heaving breast, and asked with a wry smile, "If Li Yuan wants you to sleep with him tomorrow night, will Lady be able to reject him?"

No one understood her wantonness and weak-will better than himself. Even when she was deeply in love with him in the past, she still couldn't resist Qi Yu's seduction and slept with him. After she broke off her relationship with Zhao Mu, she was still willing to allow herself to be toyed by this traitor. So these words are like a stab to her vital point.

Indeed Zhao Ya instantly was dismayed and she looked down, "Can you not ask me this kind of question! It's difficult for me to give you an answer."

Xiang Shaolong was indescribably furious, turned around and walked out as he replied icily, "Lady, please return to your residence! I still have other guest that I need entertain!"

Zhao Ya cried out piteously, "Dong Kuang!"

Once he heard how miserable and sorrowful she sounded, his heart softened and he stopped, replying with a deep voice, "Is there anything else you wish to instruct me, Lady?"

Zhao Ya went behind him and discarding all etiquette, she hugged his waist holding tightly, melding herself to his back and suddenly cried desolately, her cries filled with untold misery.

Xiang Shaolong fears neither Heaven nor Earth but he is most afraid of women crying. Remembering their past love, he embraced her and used his sleeves to frantically wipe her tears away.

Who would have known that her cries just kept intensified unstoppably, making his sleeve wet with her tears.

No matter how much Xiang Shaolong hated her, at this moment, he couldn't bear to chide her anymore.

After a while, Zhao Ya calmed down and slowly removed herself from his embrace. Her puffy red eyes glanced mournfully at him and she whispered, "Zhao Ya's leaving!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and he had a distinct feeling that her loss of composure was probably due to remembering him, Xiang Shaolong, and the sadness just welled up in her. At the same time she is no longer interested in other men so for that instant she did not know what to feel.

He nodded, "I'll send you out to the main door!"

Zhao Ya woodenly replied, "Mister, don't stand on ceremony!"

She turned around and hurriedly left.

Xiang Shaolong returned to the inner chamber and changed his clothes. In the meantime, he also sent someone to invite Zhao Zhi who had been waiting for awhile to come to the inner hall.

He felt thirsty, so he asked someone to pour him two cups of hot tea, enjoying it together with Zhao Zhi, who sat across from him.

Zhao Zhi felt slightly flattered by his treatment and occasionally stole a glance towards him.

Xiang Shaolong's heart started burning up and secretly thought that if he wanted to take her, she definitely will not refuse. Precisely because of this tempting thought, he had to make a lot of effort to rationalize his mind and forcefully control his impulses.

Zhao Zhi, at this moment in time, displayed a pitiful expression.

Truthfully, he himself didn't understand why he had not touched this beautiful lady, for it seems that Jing Jun is not enough reason for a deterrent, because it was apparent that she didn't fall in love with the boy.

Zhao Zhi whispered, "That traitor has entered the city!"

It took a while before what she said dawned on Xiang Shaolong and he asked in bewilderment, "Traitor? Oh! You mean Tian Dan?"

Zhao Zhi looked down, "I am afraid that Sister Rou might go and assassinate him without much thought."

Xiang Shaolong's heart skipped a beat, "You need to warn her not to be reckless in doing things, otherwise it will be too late for regrets."

Zhao Zhi was pleased, "So you do care about us."

Xiang Shaolong knew he had accidentally betrayed his intention and smiled wryly, "From the start, I have always cared about you two."

Zhao Zhi's pretty face seemed suddenly revitalized as she rolled her eyes at him, "But why are you always so indifferent and ruthless towards us?"

Xiang Shaolong replied exasperatedly, "That night, I wholeheartedly thought that I would be able to enjoy the night with Miss Zhi; but instead I got ambushed from the back and nearly lost my life, how much nicer do you want me to treat you?"

Zhao Zhi is after all an unmarried maiden and to hear him speak so honestly, both her cheeks blushed but on the inside she was deliriously happy as she said with embarrassment, "Sorry! That was just a misunderstanding. Zhao Zhi will now bow and apologise to you, alright?"

Surprisingly, she really did kneel down.

Xiang Shaolong was so surprised that he jumped out of his seat and to help her up.

Zhao Zhi allowed him to grab her shoulder and pressed her to her seat again. With a blushing face, she raised an eyebrow at him and asked sadly, "You're no longer angry with me?"

Xiang Shaolong felt her delicate body trembling under his hands like a frightened little bird and a surge of sympathy welled up as he said gently, "Why torture yourself like this?"

Zhao Zhi's eyes reddened as she mournfully said, "Zhao Zhi has been unlucky since young. My whole family either separated or dead. Sister Rou is constantly thinking of revenge, so my temper can be quite bad sometimes, consequently offending Mister."

Xiang Shaolong sympathized even more with her as he secretly thought that he was the one who made her say all those heartless and obstinate words. He suddenly couldn't help but feel apologetic towards her as he reached out his right hand to hold her chin up and smiled, "Let's stop with the blaming game, from today onwards, why don't we forget all about our old and new hatred forgotten?"

Zhao Zhi face turned redder as she lowered her long eyelashes and with half-lidded eyes, nodded her agreement. Who wouldn't be affected by that kind of tender expression on a young lady's face?

Xiang Shaolong can't help but leaned closer and lightly kissed her lip.

Zhao Zhi's body trembled and even her ears turned red. Her reaction was more intense than the last time when Xiang Shaolong forcefully kissed her while on the horse.

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to press her down on the bed on impulse to copulate with her but there was still an ounce of clarity in his mind as he reluctantly released her and

asked, "Where will Tian Dan be staying and how many people will be coming with him to the city?"

Zhao Zhi heard Tian Dan's name and became clearheaded again, "He's staying in the Zhao Palace. I'm not sure how many people will be coming with him, but usually, regardless of where he's going, he'll have many bodyguards around him."

She added, "Tonight, the King of Zhao will hold a banquet to welcome this traitor, and all the envoys have been invited to attend."

Xiang Shaolong knew immediately that he's not invited again. The King of Zhao is obviously on Li Yuan's side and deliberately giving him the cold shoulder.

Zhao Zhi asked shyly, "Would Mister mind going to advise my Sister Rou? In my opinion, she will definitely listen to your words."

At any rate, Xiang Shaolong couldn't allow Shan Rou to take the risk in trying to assassinate Tian Dan so he readily stood up and said, "Alright! Let's go see your sister."

Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Zhi rode their horses out of the residence. From far away, someone came riding towards them and shouted, "Master Dong, please wait!"

Both of them looked over in surprise and it turned out to be Pu Bu.

Xiang Shaolong seized the chance to tell Zhao Zhi, "Go home first and wait for me there!"

Zhao Zhi meekly nodded and left immediately.

Pu Bu stopped beside him, panting, "Marquis has invited Mister Dong to see him at once!"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his agreement and followed him back towards the Marquis' residence.

He had on several occasions wanted to reveal his identity to Pu Bu, but in the end he bit back his words. After all, a person's heart might have changed within the last half year.

Xiang Shaolong met Zhao Mu inside the secret room in the Marquis' residence.

This traitor's expression was stern as he grimaced, "Li Yanyan has indeed delivered a crown prince!"

Xiang Shaolong took a moment to understand his meaning before he exclaimed, "That's not good!"

Zhao Mu clenched his fists and stamped his foot on the floor, "This time, that little thief managed to take full advantage of us. He can openly become crown prince uncle whereas my father has to worry that the King of Chu will find out that the baby is actually his son. Just based on this alone, father is already at a disadvantage. Moreover, Li Yanyan's relationship with my dad is just based on beneficiary gains and there's no real love at all. Now with her raise in stature, she can easily manipulate the King of Chu. Li Yuan will be able to get whatever he ask for in Chu."

Xiang Shaolong remembered Li Yuan's scheming character and asked in shock, "Would Master be in danger?"

Zhao Mu was deeply worried, "You figured this out as well, now Li Yuan's biggest obstacle is my father. If I am Li Yuan, the first person I would deal with is the King of Chu. The King's health has never been good so as long as Li Yanyan leads him down the path of destruction, it's guaranteed that he wouldn't last much longer. Once the King of Chu is gone, Li Yanyan and Li Yuan would be able to legitimately control Chu's politics thru that bastard. Father has not taken any precaution against this, still thinking that the pair of siblings are still pawns that he can control but it would be so easy if those wretched siblings wants to harm him."

Xiang Shaolong calmly replied, "The only way to handle this is to use the opportunity for me to completely eliminate Li Yuan when he leaves the country by posing as horse bandits."

A shadow hung over Zhao Mu's expression and he did not speak for a long moment. Finally he sighed and said, "I'm afraid it won't be so easy. Li Yuan alone has incredible sword skills and this time, inclusive of his family warriors and attendants, he has close to five hundred people with him, even more men than you've got. Especially now that his worth has increased so much, King Xiaocheng will surely send his army to escort him back to Chu. Even when passing through Wei, the Weis will do the same too. If you act rashly, you won't gain any advantage at all."

Xiang Shaolong secretly smiled as he thought that it's a good thing that traitor knows this because it would spare him a lot of problems.

Zhao Mu was obviously very worried and after sighing in despair, he asked, "Do you have any other better strategy?"

Xiang Shaolong deliberately replied, "Let me quickly go back to Chu to report to the Master so that he would be able to take some precautions."

Zhao Mu unhappily replied, "But then who'll help me take care of things here. Besides, Father often disregard me, his own son's words so why would he listen to an outsider's advice?"

Xiang Shaolong had known for a long time that he is a selfish person, who wouldn't care about family. That's why he certainly won't let him leave. But by pretending concern like this, he will gain more of Zhao Mu's trust. He replied, "Then we have to move faster, otherwise without Master's support, even if Marquis ascend the throne, it will only attract other country's intervention."

Zhao Mu's expression was heavy as he creased his brows, "I want you to investigate for me one thing."

Xiang Shaolong said, "Marquis, please give your orders."

Zhao Mu dejectedly replied, "This last six months, King Xiaocheng has been giving me the cold shoulder. For example he recently had a few secret discussions with Li Yuan and also today, when he received Tian Dan, he wouldn't let me attend. There must be a problem somewhere."

Xiang Shaolong also found this to be odd, but hasn't gotten a chance to consider it deeply so he said offhandedly, "Could it be because Guo Kai is carrying tales?"

Zhao Mu replied with disdain, "Guo Kai is a useless man, and does not possess the ability to create friction between me and the Zhao King. I suspect it is to be Zhao Ya. She bears a heavy grudge because I ruined her relationship with Xiang Shaolong. I wonder what evidence does she holds against me that the Zhao King trusts her so much."

Xiang Shaolong broke out in cold sweat. Despite his careful planning, he has neglected the fact that he once mentioned to Zhao Ya the possible relationship between Zhao Mu and the Chu spy. Looking at things, it is likely that Zhao Ya has told this secret to King Xiaocheng, raising his suspicions about Zhao Mu. Therefore, King Xiaocheng must have bribed Guo Kai to his side and gave him promotions and responsibilities. This is to make him stronger in order to counter against Zhao Mu. Le Cheng would also have been bribed to turn against Zhao Mu. Otherwise, how can King Xiaocheng allow him to continue serving as Handan City's chief military commander?

A twist of events has made the simple task complicated beyond measure.

It is impossible to Zhao King to bring down an established senior official like Zhao Mu overnight. He has to work in the background, slowly removing his power, disallowing him access to state secrets, breaking up his connections with

other important ministers and generals. This is to minimize any further chaos in the country. Alas, after the departure of the Wu family, this country can no longer suffer another blow.

Xiang Shaolong ponders, "How would I act if I was in his shoes? The best way would be to ignore all the rules. Summon Lian Po or Li Mu (Zhao's best generals) back to Handan City to assist in bringing down Zhao Mu. This would guarantee success! With these two capable and famous generals protecting Zhao, any invaders will have to pay a price for their attack."

However, Lian Po and Li Mu are busy battling the Yan people and the northern Xiong Nu. If not, Zhao Mu would be finished by now. The day either general can return to Handan City is the best time to deal with Zhao Mu.

Realizing the serious danger he is in, Xiao Shaolong recalled Guo Kai's initial warning about Zhao Mu. Zhao Mu is indeed someone you should not be on friendly terms. In case the relationship sours due to the smallest circumstances, you may even have your entire household annihilated.

Even more complicating is that Li Yuan is now the Imperial Uncle of Chu. With his huge increase in status, King Xiaocheng has to give in more to his demands. Who can tell if this muddle-headed king will even sacrifice his horse breeder (Dong Kuang, Xiang Shaolong) to please him? Thinking of this will only bring more headaches.

Zhao Mu watched Xiang Shaolong's deep thinking and his expression switching between both hope and dismay. He thought Xiang Shaolong is worrying about both of them. He spoke in a low voice, "I can tell that Zhao Ya is smitten with you. Based on your intelligence and interaction with her, see if you can deduce any information about what she is holding against me. If we cannot salvage the situation, we will kill that weak King, control Handan and handle Lian Po and Li Mu after that."

Xiang Shaolong is awe-struck. Judging from the tone of this Zhao traitor, he seems to have a ready plan to overtake the Zhao King but is not anxious to be the Zhao King himself. Reflecting on this point, he could help but remind himself of Zhao Queen.

Zhao Mu is proficient in medicine/poisons and can enter the Zhao inner palace without obstacles. If he can work together with the Zhao Queen who has been tolerating her anger at the Zhao King, it would be not be too difficult to overthrow the Zhao throne.

Riding on the momentum, Xiang Shaolong asked, "If such a day were to come, who will be assisting Marquis in Handan City?"

Zhao Mu hesitated for a moment, said, "The only trustworthy fellows are Le Cheng and a few of my warriors personally trained by me. Luckily, I have you to help me as well. In addition to my 2000 family warriors, we should be able to attack the palace easily. We will use this plan as a last

resort. Before he gave me the cold shoulder, I can kill King Xiaocheng as easy as lifting my hand and no one would even know that I did it. Nowadays he keeps guarding against me so killing him would be much harder.”

Continuing his excited tone, “By now, you should know who Xiang Shaolong is, right?”

Xiao Shaolong had a big fright, just nodded his head to express a positive answer. He wonders why Xiang Shaolong was suddenly mentioned.

Zhao Mu continued, “I just got word from Qin. Xiang Shaolong is leading a force here to seek revenge. I will enter the palace and report this to King Xiaocheng later. However crafty is Xiang Shaolong, he will never expect I have a spy in Xianyang (Qin capital).”

Xiang Shaolong is dying to know who the spy is. But he suppressed this unwise emotion. He pretended to be surprised and quoted, “What has this got to do with our rebellion?”

Zhao Mu replied, “There is a big connection. Long Shan (Teng Yi) and your physical body resemble that of Xiang Shaolong. We can prepare wooden swords for you and disguise as him to kill the Zhao King. After ‘escaping’, the public opinion would put the blame on Xiang Shaolong, our scapegoat. This way, we will not bear the crime.”

While thinking secretly what a close shave he had, Xiang Shaolong displayed an admiration for the flawless plan, “Marquis is thorough indeed. If King Xiaocheng has any plan

to leave the palace, let me know the time and place beforehand. I will do a clean job, including leaving the necessary 'evidence'."

Zhao Mu grew happier and said, "From today onwards, we should avoid seeing each other unless absolute necessary. You have to be careful about Li Yuan. Not only has King Xiaocheng changed his treatment, even Tian Dan has distanced himself from me and build ties with him after knowing that he is now Chu's Imperial Uncle. You may not be familiar with Tian Dan. This man is much more powerful and scheming than Prince Xinling. Definitely he is not an easy man to handle."

Xiang Shaolong discovered that today is all problems upon problems.

During the expedition to steal the Lu Gong Manual, he identified Chu and Qi people are very secretive and scheming. Now that Li Yuan has the opportunity to be the most powerful man in Chu, Tian Dan would collaborate with him due to common interests in trying to break up the Three-States Pact. This will make his life more perilous. If both Li Yuan and Tian Dan exert pressure on King Xiaocheng, Xiang Shaolong may be a sacrificial lamb.

What can be done to handle such a dangerous trap?

Zhao Mu keep reminding Xiang Shaolong to check what is Zhao Ya up to before releasing him.

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed. He can no longer avoid seeing Zhao Ya. With Zhao Mu numerous Handan City spies,

he will know and be suspicious of Dong Kuang (Xiang Shaolong) if he never visited Zhao Ya.

Adding another worry is whether Zhao Ya will spill the beans on what Xiang Shaolong told her about the suspicion between Zhao Mu and the Chu spy. If Zhao Mu hears of this, he will be prone suspecting the Dong Kuang is a fake. Thinking about how Guo Kai promised to bring himself to the official brothel but has yet to fulfill his word, he must have been influenced by Li Yuan. Since King Xiaocheng's attitude has changed, and Guo Kai being the apple-polisher, he will naturally stay away from Xiang Shaolong.

Suddenly, he felt that he has lost the advantage he had in Handan. He felt cornered and attacked from all four directions. He bitterly suffers his isolation.

CHAPTER 5

Reacting with Calmness

[Translated by JUSTIN13 & SLYPHIAD]

RIGHT now is evening and the street lamps are being lighted. The autumn wind blows a chilling sensation in the air.

Teng Yi has already left the city for Hidden Army Valley and Ji Yanran is not available. Now that he wants to confide in someone, who can he look for? Thinking about his date with Zhao Zhi, he starts to feel better. His only escape to forget all the headaches is to indulge in the flesh of a beauty.

In hindsight, he cannot openly visit Ji Yanran but he can still do so discreetly. His conscious is clear and the intelligent beauty may even have a good plan to counter the present danger.

With this thought, he hurried home and changed into fresh clothes. With his skills, he slipped into Liu (Huasheng) Residence and finally found his belle in her loft.

Seeing him, Ji Yanran is crazy with happiness. After an intense frenching session, Xiang Shaolong related everything he encountered at Zhao Mu's residence.

After thinking long and hard in his bosom, Ji Yanran straightened her pose and offer, "I have a plan which would help to solve all the present problems, although I am not very happy to execute it."

Xiang Shaolong did not feel good hearing this and quickly asked her for the details.

Ji Yanran replied, "Li Yuan has been feeling dejected because of me. He is against you also because you won my favour. I have to openly show no interest in you and conspire with him. In the process, I have to make him understand that if he harms you again, I will ignore him forever. Thus, he may hate you but he will not dare to plot against you anymore."

Xiang Shaolong couldn't take it anymore. He revealed, "How can we proceed in such a manner? What if you really fall for him? Li Yuan is merciless when he wants to achieve an objective. He resembles Han Chuang who gave me a bottle of aphrodisiac to make you succumb to me."

Ji Yanran was incensed, "That shameless brat!"

After they consolidated their thoughts, Yanran hugged Shaolong, "Relax my dear. Yanran is well-equipped to deal with all kinds of evil men. I guard very well against people who try to tamper with my food and drink. Li Yuan will not succeed in wooing me. Moreover, I am the famous Ji Yanran, the stone cold maiden. If Li Yuan wants to marry me openly; he has to wait till he goes back to Chu."

Xiang Shaolong still feels uneasy, "Now that Li Yuan is the Imperial Uncle, he is probably thinking of going back to Chu to consolidate his power to match Lord Chunshen Huang Xie. If he wants to bring you back to Chu and you disagree, it will reveal your real intentions."

Ji Yanran reasoned, "If we can drag the matter for one day, we benefit the extra day. In Handan City, everyone is clamoring to Li Yuan's side. And your situation will grow from bad to worse. If we do not hasten to hold his hand, we may not be able to survive tomorrow. Let's hope the treaty will take more time to finish so that Li Yuan has to remain in Zhao for a longer period."

Xiang Shaolong secretly admits that this is the best strategy. If he tried to escape now without capturing Zhao Mu, how is he to face Lu Buwei and King Zhuangxiang? No matter what it takes, regardless of personal or official obligations, he cannot retreat without settling his blood debt.

Gritting his teeth, he consented, "Sorry to trouble Yanran!"

Before he finished his sentence, the maidservant came to report that Li Yuan has come to invite Ji Yanran to enter the palace together for the banquet.

Xiang Shaolong felt the ultimate discomfort and his heart is bleeding.

Xiang Shaolong has just arrived in the bamboo grove when the large yellow dog started barking.

This time, he entered through the front main door. Zhao Zheng welcomed him in and keeps tugging his clothes. "Please dissuade Little Rou. She never listens to anyone. Tian Dan is at the peak of his power and I did not want to see Little Rou commit such a dense act akin the moth flying towards the flame (to get burned)."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "But I do not have full confidence in dissuading her."

Zhao Zhen replied, "Despite her display of hatred for you, I can tell that she thinks often about you. These few days, she is depressed and throws tantrums and it is all because she is upset with you."

Xiang Shaolong thought of that night when he held Shan Rou on the floor. Her dress had spilled opened to reveal her white and supple legs. Swallowing his saliva, he headed to the back of the house. He asked, "Don't you employ any errand boy or page?"

Zhao Zhen explained, "I like peace so the errand boy goes over to sleep at the school after dinner. This is more

convenient for Little Rou as she cannot be seen by the public.”

Xiao Shaolong finally understood.

Zhao Zhen sent him to the stairwell and asked him to enter own his own.

Xiang Shaolong banished all the troubles in his mind, consolidate his spirits and came to the front of the door. He was about to knock when the door was pulled open.

Zhao Zhi was dressed in an entirely new outfit which put her in a different light. Waiting at the door, she gives the impression of a dainty wife welcoming her husband home after a hard day's work. In a pleasant voice she cried, “Master Dong, please come in!”

He cannot bear but look at her intensely before stepping into the hall.

Zhao Zhi let him have a good look at her. Not only is she not offended, she happily tugged his sleeve and pointed upstairs, “Sister is upstairs. Would you please go and find her?”

Xiao Shaolong endured the thought of caressing her and questioned, “Aren't you going up with me?”

Zhao Zhi giggled, “I am preparing cakes to pamper our esteemed guest. Please be lenient and don't bully too much. Remember Zhao Zhi has promised to do your bidding from now on.”

Xiang Shaolong is aroused by her tender attitude and cannot bear to hurt her anymore. He knows he is deeply entrenched with the Zhao sisters till the point of no return. After, humans are creature with feelings. The two girls have such a pitiful background. As a typical man, he is compelled to protect the weaker sex. He cannot help but feel drawn towards them.

Hai! Since he is here, he will do his best according to the circumstances.

Xiang Shaolong smoothly gave a light pinch to Zhao Zhi's cheek before ascending the stairs.

Zhao Zhi's delicate face turned red as she returned to her baking.

He reached the place where he had his first tussle with the two ladies. He did not see Shan Rou immediately. After scanning the area, he noticed two huts on the right. One has its door blinds down while the other hut seems to be uninhabited.

Xiang Shaolong purposely took off his boots and approached the hut with the blinds down.

Shan Rou's icy voice shot out from the hut, "Who is it?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Me" and lifted the blinds and entered the hut.

Shan Rou is leaning on a couch at the side of the room. She straightened herself immediately. Under the candlelight, her chiseled face and curvy lips in addition to her slightly untidy

hair gave off a tantalizing aura that Xiang Shaolong has never experienced before. Although he is used to beauties, his eyes lit up at the sight of her.

Shan Rou stared at Shaolong with mixed reactions. She tidied her hair and stood up and said embarrassingly, "I did not sleep well the last few nights. I unexpectedly fell asleep while leaning on the couch for a slight rest."

For Xiang Shaolong, this is the first time he saw this beauty in such a stylish light. In spite of strong external character, she carries another side of her. If not for the fact that he heard it with his own ears, he cannot believe Shan Rou can speak in such an affectionate tone.

Shan Rou caught Shaolong examining herself and became shy. But she resumed her icy tone and spoke displeasingly, "Will Mister Dong please wait outside; allow me to freshen up..."

Xiang Shaolong interrupted her, "No need to freshen up. Miss Rou is looking her best!"

Shan Rou's beautiful and big eyes blinked in puzzlement but she did not insist. Using her icy voice, she replied, "You are strange. My clothes and hair are disorderly and you said it is prettier. Fine! Let's talk outside."

Shan Rou was about to cross the door ledge into the inner hall when she had to stop. Apparently, Shaolong had blocked her path with his large hand. If she had gone a further two inches, her chest will collide into his huge arm.

Shan Rou could not apprehend why he wants to block the way and keep her in the room. She forgot to react and only stared at him dumbly.

Xiang Shaolong also couldn't understand why he is so rude with her. He knew that without a proper explanation, this female assassin will not take it easy on him. He spoke, "Will you assassinate Tian Dan regardless of whatever I say?"

Shan Rou is indeed distracted by him. She replied slowly, "You are not me, how would you understand how I feel? Zhao Zhi is still young that time and does not have a deep impression. But I saw with my own eyes how my parents, siblings and everyone who loved me caged in a row like pigs and dogs. They were led by traitorous soldiers who brought them back to Qi. From that moment I only have one wish – that is to kill both Zhao Mu and Tian Dan."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in agreement, "That is truly a tragedy. Supposedly, you can only kill either Zhao Mu or Tian Dan. Who will you choose?"

Shan Rou has never thought about this question. Eyes flickering, she thought for a while and replied, "I will kill Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh of relief but felt bewildered. He enquires, "Isn't Tian Dan the mastermind?"

Shan Rou revealed a pained expression. Gritting her teeth, she reasoned, "If not for Zhao Mu, my household will not be annihilated. What I detest most is he betrayed us while pretending to be our friends. Such a despicable man! In

order to please Tian Dan, he resorted to committing these heinous crimes.”

Xiang Shaolong gently offered, “Great! If you agree not to act recklessly and only to act with my permission, I will help you to assassinate Zhao Mu and let you three sisters unite. Are you agreeable?”

Shan Rou is greatly shocked. Confused, she gazed at him. Out of a sudden, her eyes turned piercing and cold. She recalled icily, “You have no reason to assist us at all. In the last meeting, Little Zhi offered you both our bodies without seeking my consent. Nonetheless, you did not waver. Why would you suddenly change your mind now? Are you not afraid this will affect your new career in Handan City?”

Xiang Shaolong is unable to answer her questions. Due to her background, Shan Rou is in a state of constant preparedness. She does not trust people easily. If he is unable to provide a satisfactory respond, he cannot win her trust, much less her cooperation. Seems like the only way out is to disclose his real identity as Xiang Shaolong. He has no idea what are consequences of this revelation.

While considering, he unconsciously let his sight rest on her naked feet. Seeing the healthy glow of her flesh, he felt attracted and aroused at the same time.

In this instant, a sharp dagger appears around his waist. Shan Rou’s cold as snow voice rung out in his ears, “Can’t even think of a good lie? I told Zhi Zhi long ago that you are only interested in our bodies. That is why you did not blow

the whistle on us. Finally you have shown your true colours. Heh! And she is defending you.”

Xiang Shaolong understands that she is thirsty for revenge and behaves differently from other people. But never in his dreams would he imagine her to start using a weapon so early in the conversation. On the other hand, he believes she will give him a chance to clarify matters before killing him. Shaking his head and smiling bitterly, he responded, “If you recognize how Zhao Mu is spreading slanders in front of the Zhao King about how I am detrimental to Zhao-Chu relationships; if you know that my only wish right now is to leave Zhao as soon as possible, then you will realize what a good reason I have to help you deal with Zhao Mu.”

Shan Rou glanced at him for a while and at long last withdrew the dagger.

Shaolong’s words are full of truths and falsehood. Shan Rou had heard from Zhao Zhi how King Xiaocheng ignores Dong Kuang but had no idea this was linked to Zhao Mu. She believed the majority of what Xiang Shaolong said.

Shan Rou moved her body towards him and allows her full, lively breasts to gently rest on his arm. Shyly she whispered, “If you can really lend us a hand in killing Zhao Mu, I will be your woman.”

Xiang Shaolong is filled with unparalleled excitement. This beauty does not make him feel guilty as she is not linked to Jing Jun. Therefore, he can rest easy and enjoy the pleasure of her flesh. What makes Shan Rou even more irresistible is

she can be cold, vicious and unyielding on one hand but can be affectionate and enthralling to tempt him on the other hand. Face with a lady as this, Xiang Shaolong is in cloud nine.

Nevertheless, if Shaolong gives in and make love to her, it would make Shan Rou look down on herself.

Pretending to be disinterested, Shaolong declared, "I wish to make things clear. Unless Miss Rou obliges me with a willing and pure intention, I would never take advantage of Miss. If this is to be a transaction, you can definitely forget about it as I am not a crafty man who takes advantage of someone when they are in need."

Shan Rou was dumbfounded and remained still. She did not move her breasts away but instead subconsciously increased the pressure. Xiang Shaolong hoped to move his arm away except he is lack the superhuman willpower and determination.

In this moment, both parties exist in an extremely delicate and subtle situation, with neither person willing to move apart or make any adjustments.

Shan Rou furrowed her eye brows, "In that case, why are you willing to accompany us in this dangerous expedition?"

Scrutinizing her beautiful jade face that is as charming as scenery of hills and lakes, Xiang Shaolong felt both adoration and sympathy. In a warm voice, he answered, "The main reason is that I really like the both of you from the bottom of my heart. It is also because of my best friend, who happens

to be Shan Lan's husband. When you meet Shan Lan in the future, you will grasp the full picture."

Footsteps sounded.

Both of them panicked. Xiang Shaolong extracted his arm from the comfort of the twin peaks while Shan Rou takes the chance to quickly get out from the room. Following behind Shan Rou, Shaolong saw Zhao Zhi carrying heated wine and aromatic cakes, smiling cheekily as she climbed the final steps.

Shan Rou moved a coffee table into the centre of the hall. Mesmerized by the two flawless beauties, Shaolong experienced a wave of romance. He took down the hanging lamp from the wall and set it in the centre of the coffee table, making it a candlelight dinner panorama.

With the three persons sitting around the table, Zhao Zhi hastily pour a cup of hot, steaming wine for everyone. The wine smelled wonderful. She then dispensed the pastries and smiled sweetly, "Mister Dong, please try Zhao Zhi's baking skill. They taste best when hot."

Xiang Shaolong recalled that he had missed his dinner and busied himself with the cakes. Whether it is due to hunger or not, the cakes taste delicious and he kept praising them to no end. Zhao Zhi's smile brightened with his compliments.

Shan Rou only took one piece and watched Shaolong as he handled his first wave of wine and cakes. When he finished the first round, she asked in a surprisingly intimate tone, "Has Mister Dong prepared a plan yet?"

Xiang Shaolong knew that unless he showed some trump cards, Shan Rou will never believe him. He simply replied, "Zhao Mu is planning to rebel; are you aware of it?"

Both girls look at each other for answers.

Shan Rou reasoned, "How would you know about such matters? Didn't you just say that he is out to harm you?"

Xiang Shaolong silently thought this it is indeed not easy to deceive this head tigress. Holding a calm outlook, he replied, "This matter is complicated beyond measure."

He abruptly creased his eye brows and remained mute.

Both girls are amazed at his reaction and looked at him dumbly.

Xiang Shaolong is pondering over if he should reveal his true identity. This will save a lot of needless explanation and prevent further misunderstanding.

The conditions are all very obvious. Based on Shan Lan's sisterhood, they will not betray him. In addition, both sisters are attracted to him. Zhao Zhi is even in love with both of his characters.

Shan Rou asked with suspicion, "Are you deceiving us? That's why you cannot justify your answers"

Zhao Zhi came to his defense, "Sister Rou, Mister Dong is not that kind of person."

Shan Rou demanded angrily, "You let him explain himself!"

Xiang Shaolong suddenly decided. He was relieved to unload such big burdens off his shoulder. He gazed upward and let himself down, lying on the floor, rubbing his stomach, “Zhi Zhi, you made the best cake in the whole world.”

Shan Rou was angry, “Don’t try to deflect the question towards her. Quickly answer my question.”

Xiang Shaolong spread out both his hands and his legs crossing under the big table just barely grazing Shan Rou’s leg on the opposite side of the table.

Shan Rou was annoyed as she moves aside, “If you keep evading, I’m going to kill you.”

Xiang Shaolong pointed at his neck, “You pointed your sword here then I’ll tell you the truth.”

Both sisters locked gaze and felt totally confused. This person’s behaviors were always out of the ordinary, truly made them unsure on what to do.

Xiang Shaolong took advantage of the time that he wasn’t in their line of vision, to turn around and bend over to take off his mask, before swiftly sitting down again. As if there’s nothing wrong, he extended his hand and grabbed another cake, slowly munching it.

Both girls at first didn’t realize what’s going on until they saw him clearly, and then they started screaming in shock.

Shan Rou moved backward, pulled out her knife, returning to her old scary bad wolf expression.

Zhao Zhi, on the other hand, was dumb struck. She kept staring at him in disbelief.

Xiang Shaolong sat on his knee, continued to drink his wine calmly, and narrowed his eyes as he lazily stared at them, "I truly have been lying to you all along, but you have to understand my difficulty!"

Zhao Zhi calmed down again, stood up. Her whole face was blushing up to her ears. She looked down shamefully, upset, "Xiang Shaolong, you truly ashamed me, how could I face you again?"

Xiang Shaolong of course understood her meaning, smiled, "Relax! I won't be jealous of Dong Kuang. Even more, he hasn't done anything towards you yet."

Zhao Zhi was both upset and embarrassed. She doesn't know what to say anymore but everyone can see how joyful she is deep inside.

Shan Rou suddenly lighted up, packed away his knife and sat down, "You are truly amazing. You even deceived the whole town of Handan."

Xiang Shaolong put on his mask again, returning back to his Dong Kuang's identity. Both girls marveled at the change.

Shan Rou turned towards Zhao Zhi, "He looks better like this."

Xiang Shaolong didn't know whether to cry or laugh, stretched his waist, "Now you don't have to be suspicious of why I want to kill Zhao Mu! But I felt that it's too easy for

him to just be killed right away, so I want to capture him alive to bring back to Xianyang to receive just punishment. I hope you two sisters wouldn't object."

Both girls were stunned.

Xiang Shaolong continued, "The Qis sent Shan Lan to Lu Buwei as a gift. Fortunately, Lu Buwei turned around and gave her to me. She and my brother, Teng Yi, fell in love at first sight and got married right away. It's all very romantic."

He turned towards Zhao Zhi and said, "Today, the one who beat Li Yuan's famous underlings in a row was Teng Yi. Now you understand why he's called Long Shan, right?"

Shan Rou was murmuring, "Fell in love at first sight". She felt that these words were totally refreshing.

Zhao Zhi suddenly understood and looked down, "So where is Jing Jun?"

Xiang Shaolong started to hope again for Jing Jun, honestly replied, "Sister Zhi, are you interested in my brother?"

Zhao Zhi was so surprised that she looked up again, afraid that Xiang Shaolong misunderstood her intention, spit out, "No! I only thought of him as a playful kid! But he's very friendly!"

Xiang Shaolong became somber. He realized that he can't force feeling. Jing Jun can only kill his feeling towards her.

After knowing that he's Xiang Shaolong, Shan Rou's curiosity was aroused and she continuously watched him, "So what is our next move?"

Xiang Shaolong directly explained the situation to them, "Zhao Mu or Tian Dan. Between the two of them, we can only choose one. Before Sister Rou already chose Zhao Mu, so we used this as our goal. If only we could get Zhao Mu to rebel, we will get the opportunity to capture him alive from Han Dan."

Zhao Zhi had already stopped being embarrassed, happily asked, "What can we sisters do to help?"

Xiang Shaolong was touched and told them of Tian Zhen, "Lady Zhi, would you mind contacting her on my behalf so she won't be worried. If it's not important, please don't look for me. I will send Jing Jun to contact you."

Both girls were disappointed.

Shan Rou stubbornly insisted, "No one has seen me before. If you can arrange for me to be by your side, we'll be able to work together towards this."

Xiang Shaolong's head was spinning, "This could arouse suspicion, let me think about it first, alright?"

Shan Rou frostily replied, "If I don't hear back from you in two days, I will pretend to be your wife coming to Han Dan to look for you."

Xiang Shaolong lost his voice, "What?"

Shan Rou haughtily raised her chin, atrociously replied, "Too bad if you didn't hear it!"

Zhao Zhi pitifully asked, "What about me?"

It's too late for Xiang Shaolong to regret his decision. He bitterly smiled as he stood up and shrugged, "Give me some time to think about this!"

Zhao Zhi astonished, "Where are you going?"

This time, it's Xiang Shaolong's turn to be surprised, "Of course going home!"

Shan Rou grunted, "Men! Don't understand women heart! Zhi Zhi wants you to stay and spend the night with her! Stop pretending to be dumb."

Shan Rou stood up and headed out of the room. Just as she reached the curtain, she stopped and turned around, leaning on the door, "My room's just next door. The only thing barring the room is this curtain. If you're not afraid to die, just come and look for me, Shan Rou!"

She grinned right after she finished spoken. With a slightly flushed face, she lifted the curtain and left.

Xiang Shaolong saw a flaming red face Zhao Zhi. He couldn't help but feel excited, thinking that it has all come to this. He doesn't need to be considerate anymore. Furthermore, Zhao Zhi's life so far has been miserable. Her love life also wasn't as one wishes, how he could not sympathize with her.

Anyway, in this time period, who doesn't have three wives four concubines and a large harem? As long as both sides agree, no one would blame you. But he also thought that that place wasn't an appropriate place, gently said, "Come home with me?"

Zhao Zhi was terribly embarrassed that she doesn't know where to hide, nodded slightly.

He felt warm throughout on seeing this.

Xiang Shaolong shouted towards Shan Rou's room, "Zhi Zhi will follow me home, what are you planning to do?"

Shan Rou replied, "I'm very sleepy. You guys should leave! Remember, you only have two days to think."

Xiang Shaolong shook his head in grim and waved Zhao Zhi to go ahead downstairs.

CHAPTER 6

Cornered!!

[Translated by SLYPHIAD & JUSTIN13]

THIS joke-loving person was imposing, “Lady Ya is looking for you. She seems very unsettled, insisting on waiting for you to come home inside.”

Xiang Shaolong didn’t expect Zhao Ya to return again after leaving earlier, now that banquet specially set up to welcome Tian Dan hadn’t finished, how come she left the banquet halfway and come looking for him?

He gently said to Zhao Zhi, “Zhi Zhi, you go first to the east room to wait for me!”

Zhao Zhi at that time had become very attentive towards him. Without any protest, she went and followed Wu Guo.

Xiang Shaolong quickly went to the inner hall. As he was about to step over the threshold, Zhao Ya had in a flash already turned around, her face paled, her pair of eyes were full of despair.

He was shaken, came over and said, "What happened? What scared you so badly?"

Zhao Ya seemed to have changed into another person, with a shocking voice replied, "Dong Kuang! Zhao Ya is here to do an irresistible transaction with you."

Xiang Shaolong became wary. His eyes became grim and his lips hinted of a smile, calmly asked, "Even if it's got to do with my life, I might still reject it."

Zhao Ya realized that she had provoked the opponent, sighed and became soft, "Let's consider another circumstance then, just think of this as me requesting your help. As long as you agree, from this moment on, Zhao Ya would only listen to your command. What do you think Mister Dong?"

Xiang Shaolong was confused. What kind of circumstance would force this lascivious lady to not hesitate to sacrifice everything, betting everything on this request? He creased his eyebrows, "I'll listen to your request first."

Zhao Ya replied with a bleak voice unlike her usual calm and gentle voice, "Dong Kuang, you might not know that you are

currently in a critical situation. After Li Yuan had been informed that he had just become the country's uncle, he proposed to our king to detain you back to Chu. Otherwise, he wouldn't support the alliance between the two countries."

Xiang Shaolong was furious. If this afternoon, he had killed him, then he would have gotten rid of any future troubles.

Zhao Ya saw him turned solemn, but still in a calm mood without displaying any of his emotions and thoughts. She admired this of him, softly said, "Brother currently is still hesitating. What he was most afraid of is that even if he sacrificed you, Chu will still be like in the past break their promises. In that case, he would lose in both cases."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt like laughing out loud.

Among the absurd things in the world, there is none that surpassed this example. From this event, you can tell that Xiaocheng is an exceptionally selfish being and every person is just a statistic to him.

If he has a troop of elite Qin soldiers on call, he would definitely make trouble for both Xiaocheng and Li Yuan these two crafty bustards. Zhao Ya continued, "Presently, I am the only person who can influence Xiaocheng, allowing you to flourish in Handan alive. So if Zhao Ya is dead set on doing your bidding, it will benefit Mister Dong in many areas."

Xiang Shaolong recollects the day after he defeated Lian Jin. Zhao Ya had this same display of intensity of power when she negotiated with him. Snickering, he solicited, "I know

Miss is great both in and out of bed but you have yet to tell me what assignment you have in mind for me.”

Zhao Ya’s eyes shot out a look of determination. She plainly said, “I want you to contact a person and warn him never to step into Handan City. The Zhao King has received secret information that he is on his way to Handan and has laid traps everywhere, waiting for him to send himself to his demise.”

Xiang Shaolong’s athletic body trembled, gazing at Zhao Ya with eyes wide open.

He finally understood what has transpired.

Zhao Da (Zhao Ya’s bodyguard) is right; Zhao Ya has been unable to forget her feeling for him. The moment she knew about Zhao Mu’s secret message from Qin, she dropped everything and approached him to warn Xiang Shaolong so as to save him from the traps of Zhao.

Composed, Zhao Ya explained, “You, Dong Kuang, are the only man in Handan with the courage and strength to accomplish this task. Most of your subordinates are staying outside the city and are used to the wilderness. I reckon only your forces have the ability to intercept Xiang Shaolong and his followers.”

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to embrace her deeply and tell her he is the Xiang Shaolong she had wanted to save.

Zhao Ya squirmed under his stare. Hanging her head lowly, she pressed, “Dong Kuang, please give me answer quickly.

Let me remind you. If I am rejected again, even I would not know what I will do next.”

Xiang Shaolong has seen what she will resort to when driven to the wall. Letting out a big sigh, he chided, “If you had known this would be the result, why do it in the first place?”

Zhao Ya was expressionless as she chanted his words twice. Unable to hold her tears anymore, she wailed, “Because Zhao Ya does not want to betray him for a second time.”

Xiang Shaolong could feel his emotions rising. Rushing forward, he grabbed her shoulders and barked sharply, “Look at me!”

Zhao Ya was taken aback at this outburst.”Why is Mister Dong so emotional?”

“I am Xiang Shaolong!”

He was about to explode but at the last moment, he swallowed his words and made a heart-rending promise, “Rest assured Princess. I will help you not because of your threat, but because I am touched by the selfless love you have for Xiang Shaolong. I, Dong Kuang, hereby swear that if Xiang Shaolong stepped into Handan City one step, I will bear no descendants and die an inconceivable death!”

Zhao Ya stuttered, “Dong Kuang! Do you know how grateful Zhao Ya is towards you?”

From her bosom, she produced a cloth painting and gave it to Xiang Shaolong. “This is his portrait. Obviously, he will

assume a different identity and appearance to cover his tracks.”

Receiving the painting, Xiang Shaolong yanked it open for a look. The fine lines detailing his appearance gave it a life-like manifestation. He was shaken and enquired, “Who drew this?”

Zhao Ya replied, “I did.”

Xiang Shaolong surmised, “Seeing this painting is like seeing the real person. From this we can conclude Xiang Shaolong has left a deep and strong impression in the mind of Princess.”

Zhao Ya shot out a strange look. She looked closely at him and slowly quotes, “You have strong piercing eyes that could compare to Xiang Shaolong’s.”

Xiang Shaolong smilingly said, “Princess’s love for Xiang Shaolong is well-known. Are you not afraid of jealousy from evil admirers?”

Zhao Ya heartbreakingly answered, “You are a special man. Among the men I have come across, you are the only one who can make me forget Xiang Shaolong. Are you happy now?”

Xiang Shaolong naturally accepted, “Very happy. Princess, please return to your home. I need to assign my men and investigate the surroundings so as to accomplish this case that you have appealed to me. At the end of the day, I have

full confidence in intercepting Xiang Shaolong and invite him to return back to Xianyang.”

Zhao Ya gratefully agreed to his recommendations to leave. Her mind is full of concern for Xiang Shaolong’s safety and can longer think of other matters. But if Dong Kuang had asked her to stay, she would not reject him.

All the love and hatred for Zhao Ya has dissipated for Xiang Shaolong at this point in time. He accompanied her to the main door and both parties remain in silence.

Reaching the waiting horse carriage, Zhao Ya can no longer hold herself and beseeched softly, “Mister Dong is indeed someone who does not bother about the danger around him.”

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh, “Birth and death are fated. Worrying is good for nothing”

Amidst laughter, he returned to his villa.

Zhao Ya waited until his silhouette had disappeared before rousing up. Within the carriage, her mind kept revisiting “Birth and death are fated.”

Having untied his knotty issue regarding Zhao Ya, Xiang Shaolong completely recovered his self-confidence and has the strength to deal with his powerful foes such as Li Yuan and King Xiaocheng

The mindset of the Special Forces is to win through unique methods.

Using smaller numbers to defeat bigger numbers. Using elite to defeat the ordinary.

Utilising the highly efficient organization, he is convinced that no one can keep them in Handan City. Once they leave the city and enter the wild, their chances of escape and survival would be even higher.

Momentarily, he abandons all his thoughts and fear and march towards the unforeseeable future.

Tonight, he still needs to seek out Ji Yanran and inform her that she need not put up with Li Yuan the petty thief anymore.

Arriving in the east room, Zhao Zhi is leaning her face on her palm with her elbow on the table. She is waiting for him painfully.

Watching Xiang Shaolong stepping over the door ledge and looking full of energy, she happily pounced on him and checked, "Has Zhao Ya left?"

Xiang Shaolong held her soft fingers and brought her through different rooms, going deeper into his villa.

Halfway through, Wu Guo intercepted them. Peeping twice at the shy Zhao Zhi, he reported, "Since dawn, there are some stalkers outside our quarters. We have located their exact locations. There are four of them and situated in front and behind our villa."

Xiang Shaolong coldly commanded, "Capture them alive and interrogate them. I want to know who sent them."

Zhao Zhi was stunned and focused her beautiful big eyes on him

Wu Guo is pleased and rushed off.

Xiang Shaolong reached out and gives a light pinch to Zhao Zhi's egg-shaped face. Dragging her along the way, he grinned, "Does Miss Zhi know where I am bringing you and what are we about to do together?"

Zhao Zhi's face turned red and whispered, "I know!"

Xiang Shaolong chuckled, "What do you know?"

Zhao Zhi cannot resist looking at his wonderful physique. Bashfully, she protested, "You are very good with your methods. No matter which identity you assumed, you are able to make me feel attracted to you, causing me days of untold suffering!"

Xiang Shaolong pulled her straight into the bath quarters. Someone has prepared hot water and poured it into a pool. There are another three bronze pots of hot water on standby.

How in the world would Zhao Zhi have guessed the destination is the bath quarters? Not knowing what to do and at a complete loss, she hesitated between going ahead and backing away. Observing her introvert expressions only caused Xiang Shaolong's blood to race even faster.

Waving the servants to take their leave and after closing the door, Xiang Shaolong remove Blood Wave and laid it besides

the pool. Stripping his outer garments, his climbing tools and flying needles are exposed.

Zhao Zhi was horrified that Xiang Shaolong was a single man armed like an entire army. Putting aside her shyness, she lightly assisted him to remove his hardware.

Xiang Shaolong took off his mask and placed it neatly, and proceeded to take off her clothes.

Reacting to his movements, Zhao Zhi's entire body turned soft and cannot even stand properly.

Under Xiang Shaolong's well trained hands, Zhao Zhi is only left with a thin and tight singlet and a pair of short panties. Her neck, shoulder, breasts and feet are all fully displayed.

Her flexible and curvy silhouette, her firm flesh and her scent would cause anyone to undergo the magical seduction of a youthful body.

Xiang Shaolong is not in a hurry to strip her all the way. Locking her strongly in an embrace, he kissed her for long session, making her pant. Releasing her, he mocked, "Xiang Shaolong and Dong Kuang, who is a better suitor to win your heart?"

Zhao Zhi chose, "I'm afraid it is Dong Kuang! Sometimes you use hard tactics, sometimes, you use soft tactics. It has made me terribly confused and lost my bearings. I cannot even have a good meal and have no idea how to please you."

Xiang Shaolong felt apologetic and felt more love for her. Hugging her and sitting by the pool, they dipped their feet

into the hot water. Cheekily he asked, "Let me serve Zhi Zhi to take a shower as an apology, it is ok?"

Zhao Zhi was both happy and timid. "It should be Zhi Zhi serving hubby instead," she corrected.

Xiang Shaolong took off the rest of her clothes. Admiring her ivory white skin and her full naked body in the misty bath quarters, he said in a soft voice, "If you regret, you can reject me now!"

Zhao Zhi's heart was thumping non-stop but she maintained her stand and shook her head vigorously.

The steam generated caused the light from two wall lamps of the bath quarters to become blurred, creating a special romantic ambience.

Xiang Shaolong swiftly stripped to his birthday suit and exhibits his manly aura and perfect toned body. He leaped into the pool first and carried Zhao Zhi from her seat at the poolside into the warmth of the water. He started to scrub her carefully.

Zhao Zhi's flawless body started to tremble. She stood in the centre of the pool and allowing her lover to do whatever he wants. Her wet black hair was glowing and they were sticking to her back and her chest. Such a seductive posture made Xiang Shaolong stopped scrubbing and grabbed her for an intensive kiss.

After being through the various challenges, their love is finally seeing a bright future.

Under Zhao Zhi's passionate and active responses, Xiang Shaolong remembered the times when he was frolicking with the different girls and maids in the Zhao palace pool. Now that Zhao Ni (the other princess who committed suicide after being raped by Zhao Mu) is no longer around and Zhao Ya's relationship has taken a different turn, he swelled up with various emotions.

In this condition, he has a strong urge and his target is of course the beauty naked in his embrace. Even if someone held a knife to his neck, it will not discourage him from taking her.

For a while, the bath quarters is filled with Xiang Shaolong's wild breathing and Zhao Zhi's delirious and delighted moaning

When Xiang Shaolong slipped into her room agilely, Ji Yanran has just taken down her accessories and is looking at her bronze mirror blankly. Catching the man she has been pining for, she leapt into his arms.

Xiang Shaolong blew out the lamp and cuddled her onto the bed. After a passionate and intense kiss, he related Zhao Ya's encounter.

Ji Yanran mused, "She is still unable to forget you! Yanran has always been bewildered at why would any woman want to betray you?"

Avoiding the question, he chortles, "Please do not get entangled with Li Yuan anymore. This will affect me

emotionally and distract me from the circumstances at hand.”

Ji Yanran cooed, “Judging at how confident you are, Yanran loves you even more! You have caught Guo Kai’s four-man surveillance team, what do you plan to do next?”

Xiang Shaolong replied innocently, “Early tomorrow, I am going to employ some methods to force King Xiaocheng to explain his stand. This muddle-headed king has always been indecisive. If I do not give him a wakeup call, he may well heed Li Yuan’s advice.”

Ji Yanran loved his ‘wake up call’ description. At the same time, she sighed, “I had thought Li Yuan is a man of talent. This cad is a loser who doesn’t care about the big picture. If the governance of Chu were to be in his scheming hands, what hope does the state of Chu have?”

Xiang Shaolong thought of something and enquired, “You have seen Tian Dan. What kind of a person is he?”

Thinking silently for a while, Ji Yanran gave a rundown, “He is a very powerful and charming man but is also a lecher. The way he looks at you makes you feel that he want to swallow you up immediately into his stomach. Compared to Li Yuan, he has the air of a powerful general.”

Xiang Shaolong joked, “In this case, you are also attracted to him.”

Ji Yanran said, “You can put it this way, but it is not male-female attraction but human to human observation.”

Xiang Shaolong guffawed, "You don't have to clarify. I am not a petty person."

Ji Yanran joyfully kissed him and state, "Of course you are not petty, but I am your woman and it is necessary to be transparent for matters like these."

Xiang Shaolong thought about Li Yuan. Frowning, he asked, "What about the Li little thief?"

Ji Yanran followed his (frowning) tone and sighed, "I wittily hinted the little thief that we do not have any relationship. His spirits rose and started speaking with better composure. Along the way he kept bragging on how he will manage the politics of Chu in the future. He sounds correct but he neglected the threat of Qin. He is only concerned about expanding his territory but has no idea on ruling the country well internally. I can only sigh at him."

Xiang Shaolong continued, "Did he send you back?"

Ji Yanran countered, "I will not cheapen myself to that level. Riding with him to the palace is torturous enough. This person may look good on the outside is actually full of crap."

Xiang Shaolong put down the huge rock on his mind. Both hands slithered into her inner vest and started to fondle.

Ji Yanran could not speak another word. Nights of passion are always too short. She was still having the sweetest dreams while Xiang Shaolong slipped away before dawn breaks.

Stealing back to his house, Zhao Zhi laid flat in his bed. Tucked under a blanket, a blissful smile hanging by the corners of her mouth.

Xiang Shaolong silently laughed at himself, thinking that the entire episode had been ludicrous.

It might be due to the extreme danger surrounding him or the ruthlessness of his enemies. Either way, Xiang Shaolong is all fired up to put up a good fight and to win both battles of love and war. After enjoying two beloveds in a row, he is dog tired and gave up thinking. Embracing Zhao Zhi, he threw his head back and went into slumber.

He finally woke up in the afternoon. He caught Zhao Zhi with her eyes closed but her eye lashes fluttering. Knowing that she was awake but pretending to be asleep, he purposely exclaimed, "Hey! Since you are still asleep, let's go for second round!"

Flipping around he got on top and pinned her down.

Zhao Zhi has just had her first love-making session and had no energy for the second battle. Opening her eyes widely, she pleaded for mercy.

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Hahaha.... See if you still dare to deceive me?"

Jumping up from the bed, he was in great spirits as he washed up and got dressed whereas Zhao Zhi continued to laze in bed.

Stepping out of the inner hall, Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo, and Jing Jun have followed his instructions to summon all the 300 elite force soldiers back to his residence.

Not knowing if it was initiated by Teng Yi, Jing Jun knelt down immediately and declared in a thankful manner, "Jing Jun knows third brother is helping fifth brother to take care of Sister Zhi. Regarding her issue, I only have happiness and not even a hint of jealousy!"

Xiang Shaolong realised why Teng Yi rushed back to Hidden Army Valley. He wanted Jing Jun to spell out matters once and for all and not making himself feel bad. Zhao Zhi is Teng Yi's sister-in-law and obviously he did not want love to spoil the relationship between the two sisters.

Xiang Shaolong supported Jing Jun up. Wu Zhuo was chuckling at the side, "You need not worry about this kid. He made an excuse to go hunting but went to a nearby village to pick up a sweet-like-honey village girl. You have no idea how much fun he had these few days."

Jing Jun nearly died from embarrassment.

Teng Yi enquired, "What has happened? When we got the news this morning, we set off immediately."

Xiang Shaolong did not answer him first. Glancing at Wu Guo who looked like he wanted to say something, he predicted, "How long has Guo Kai been waiting?"

Wu Guo was impressed, "Third master is indeed good at forecasting. Master Guo has been waiting for one hour in the outer hall."

Xiang Shaolong explained his plan to Teng Yi and company. He returned to his room and spoke briefly with Zhao Zhi before going out to receive Guo Kai.

When this malicious man saw Xiang Shaolong, he put on a smile and said, "Mister Dong must be mistaken. These four men are merely here to ensure your safety!"

Xiang Shaolong is very amused, "Using these four clowns to protect me, Master Guo sure knows how to joke. Having said that, I would not hold it against them. As a matter of fact, I am about to leave Handan City and definitely have no time to hold it against them."

Guo Kai was blown away. He asked in disbelief, "Why is Mister leaving?"

Xiang Shaolong coldly answered, "Since this place does not desire me, other places will. Except for Zhao and Chu, who will not welcome a horse breeder like myself?"

Guo Kai's face changed colour and turned cold, saying "Since Mister Dong belonged to Zhao, leaving like that is as good as rebelling. Please reconsider."

Xiang Shaolong eyes blinked coldly. Staring at Guo Kai face to face, he used his strongest tone, "Under my command are three hundred death warriors. They have all spent years with foreign horse bandits and are used to fighting for their lives.

Every one of them is capable enough to fight a hundred enemies all by himself. We are going to force our way through the city gates. Your Majesty may feel free to dispense his army. We shall see if my subordinates are cowards who flee in danger. We can also show that world how Your Majesty repays kindness with cruelty.”

Ignoring Guo Kai's persuasion, he walked towards the courtyard. Teng Yi and the three hundred elite troops are armoured and armed with swords and bows, ready to fight when commanded.

As Xiang Shaolong climbed onto his war-house (Jifeng?), Guo Kai rushed over and held onto the head of the horse. Almost begging, he pleaded, “Mister Dong, please stop whatever that you are doing. Everything can be discussed. Why don't we ride into the palace to see the King and clear up the misunderstanding?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled coldly, “If Master Guo wishes to keep his hands where they are, please let go now.”

Guo Kai knows his swordsmanship is excellent and quickly withdrew his hands in fear.

Xiang Shaolong roared, “The way Zhao King treats Dong Kuang is enough to send shivers down the spine. Pei!”

He spit and continued in a loud voice, “We are leaving the city now. We will kill whoever that blocks our path!”

The three hundred elite soldiers rallied in unison. The commotion can be heard far and wide, causing fear to those who heard it.

The residence door flew open and Teng Yi rode out first, leading the pack.

Guo Kai knew that things are going out of control and hastily left for the palace to report to King Xiaocheng.

The huge body of troops slowly moved towards the nearest East Gate.

Under the planning of Xiang Shaolong, the news spread like wild fire and in a while, the entire city of Handan knew about their departure. Everybody came to surround and watch the proceedings while a large number of people begged them to stay.

After the exit of the Wu Family, everyone viewed this horse fanatic as their new saviour. The gift of a thousand war-horses is like a life-saving pill for the people of Zhao. Their abrupt leaving is causing public panic.

The East Gate commander has gotten word of the situation and hurriedly closed the city gate. He assembled archers on the battlements and foot soldiers in front of the gate.

Funnily, the city gates are built to repel external invaders and not internal attacks so there wasn't much of an advantage.

Le Cheng was the first to reach the gate. After fortifying the gate defences, he rode out and waited on the main road

leading to the gate, ready to negotiate with this horse fanatic

Teng Yi saw the huge army blocking the path. Under his command, everyone held up a large shield on the right hand and a bow on the left hand. Using only their legs to control the horse, this display highlighted a huge attacking power and made everyone shrink back.

Le Cheng shouted, "Mister Dong, please come and speak with Le Cheng."

Teng Yi issued a new command and the three hundred troops broke up into two groups. Divided on two sides, each group gathered debris and wood to serve as fortification. Smart and imposing, they were on high alert and ready to fight on command.

This leaves only Xiang Shaolong highly perched on his horse in the open. Facing Le Cheng, he hollered bravely, "Although I respected General Le greatly, times have changed. If General insists on preventing me, there will be a skirmish and I will not hold my hand."

Le Cheng was troubled, "What has happened that Mister had taken such an extreme measure? Everything can be discussed. Why not Mister and General pay a visit to His Majesty? If His Majesty approves, Mister can leave in peace. Isn't this better than staining the gates with blood?"

By now, there are more and more people crowding to see the excitement. The nearby streets and alleys are all filled

up. Of course, nobody dared to enter the main road that is packed with countless soldiers.

Xiang Shaolong has a sharp vision. He noticed a large body of royal bodyguards appearing near an area behind Le Cheng. He deduced that Zhao King is on his way here via one of the city wall outlets. Laughing in his heart, he called out, "Is General Le jesting with me? If I enter the palace just like that, it would be a miracle if I am not tied up and sent to Chu as a gift. I only hate myself for being a blind boor. Undertaking such an arduous journey back to serve my country, I thought Zhao will follow tradition (using horses instead of chariots) as dictated by the previous kings and use horse battles to conquer the world. Who would have expected that Zhao will fall not on the battlefield but on the negotiating table with the state of Chu? I am disheartened and I will fight to my death in Handan to show that I, Dong Kuang, am a man of resolution."

Le Cheng was dumbfounded. All his captains and soldiers displayed looks of pity and morale was low. On the other hand, Xiang Shaolong's troops were not afraid to die. Their spirits were high and are just waiting to attack.

Zhao soldiers made some movement. King Xiaocheng rode out with Guo Kai and Cheng Xu on his two sides. He has a determined look and upon reaching Le Cheng, he called out, "Subject Dong, please ignore those rumours. I have no intention of sending you back to Chu. It is a misunderstanding."

Xiang Shaolong looked up into the sky and gave a long laugh, "Your Majesty, please forgive me for being frank. Now that Qin has their soldiers on our borders and the Xiong Nu are up north waiting for opportunities to invade us, our country is in mortal danger. But all I, Dong Horse Fanatic, can do is waste my time away because we are afraid to offend some contentious assholes. History has told us that if we fight among ourselves, the only result is broken families and a conquered country. You win the war by fighting, not by begging."

Someone in the crowd started to cheer and more people are affected. Soon, there was thunderous applause all around, praising Shaolong's words.

Xiang Shaolong put on a very angry expression and yelled, "Your Majesty, please move away from the battlefield. I am going to lead my troops to break out of this encirclement and the city. If I am unlucky enough to sacrifice on the battle grounds, let it be my repayment towards you. If my death can inspire Zhao to flourish and not be manipulated by people with bad intentions, I will die in peace."

These words are both hard and soft, giving the Zhao King the break he needed.

King Xiaocheng is in a dilemma. He loved and hated this Dong horse fanatic, but he has a guilty conscious. He has had plans to sacrifice this Dong Kuang in exchange for Li Yuan persuading the Chu King to join hands against Qin.

King Xiaocheng surveyed his army and civilians from near and far. Everyone felt sympathy for Dong Kuang. Sighing to himself, he promised, "Subject Dong's words are provoking indeed. I concur with your thinking and from today onwards, Brother Dong, please open up your heart and help Zhao rear horses and related. Please stay Mister. I will not ill-treat Mister."

From all four corners, the army and the civilians cheered like thunder and it is the first time they cheered for King Xiaocheng.

Xiang Shaolong delightedly confirmed, "The king keeps his promise!"

King Xiaocheng helplessly confirmed, "Definitely keeping my promise!"

Xiang Shaolong knew that the show is about to finish. He flipped down his horse and kneeled down, giving his thanks.

On Teng Yi's command, three hundred elite troops dismounted and prostrate themselves in a swift and orderly manner. In one voice, they shouted, "Long live the king." This gives a lot of face to King Xiaocheng.

An earth-shattering event ended on a satisfactory note.

That moment, King Xiaocheng and Xiang Shaolong rode together back to the palace for a feast while Teng Yi led the troops back to Hidden Army Valley.

That same afternoon, Xiang Shaolong led a second and last batch of five hundred war horses into the farm while making

it a grand affair. This is to teach Zhao King not to belittle the usefulness of this horse fanatic.

Relying on bravery and opportunity, Xiang Shaolong resolved the frontal danger brought by Li Yuan.

CHAPTER 7

Giving In To Madam

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AFTER the event, Xiang Shaolong's status rose a few times. That night, Zhao King hosted a special banquet to appease him. Those present were all ministers and generals. Both Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi were present and their relationships with him are now very different. They do not have to make any excuses to get close to him like before.

Zhao Zhi has tasted the forbidden fruit for the first time. Since then, she has become more attractive and charming.

Zhao Mu saw an opening and berated him in a low voice, "Such an important matter, why didn't you discuss with me in the first place?"

Xiang Shaolong has long prepared his model answer. Sincerely, he replied, "Firstly, things are moving too quickly. Secondly, I deliberately kept this from Marquis. If there was an inquiry, this would have nothing to do with you and would not raise any suspicions."

Zhao Mu is still slightly uncomfortable but he couldn't help but praised, "You did a beautiful job. With a talent like you by my side, what can I not achieve?"

To increase Zhao Mu's trust in himself and to stir him to rebel at the same time, Xiang Shaolong lied, "I have gotten some information from Zhao Ya. This matter has got Qi involved. I haven't got the details but who is Zhao Ya closest to among the people of Qi?"

At the mere mention, Zhao Mu faced darkened, "It must be Qi Yu; he came along with Tian Dan on this trip. Heh! Despite my loyalty towards Tian Dan, he still betrayed me!"

Xiang Shaolong then came to know that Qi Yu is here as well. Leveraging on this, he asked, "Why is Marquis so unwise to reveal your secret to Tian Dan?"

Zhao Mu explained, "It is only because of the Lu Gong's secret manual and that Xiang Shaolong. But they do not know my real identity; they only knew I keep in secret contact with Dad. But if King Xiaocheng knows about this matter, then I would be in a precarious situation."

Xiang Shaolong was about to delve deeper into the secret manual incident when Zhao Ba led Zhao Zhi over.

He asked, "When is Mister Dong free to come and give us some pointers at the training school?"

Xiang Shaolong knew that he could not refuse. Powerless, he fixed a date and time. Admiring Zhao Zhi, he added, "Let Zhao Zhi come and fetch me on that day."

Knowing that Xiang Shaolong is crazy over her and created this excuse and opportunity, this horny beauty is mad with joy.

Both Zhao Mu and Zhao Ba gave Zhao Zhi a strange glance.

This time, the voluptuous Zhao Ya came by. Taking him aside, she commend, "I am beginning to feel that you are a brilliant man. Without my help, you are able to turn the tables around. Just wondering if your promise is still valid?"

Xiang Shaolong beat his chest and promised, "A man's word is his bond. Why would I want to cheat a beauty like you? Just rest assured. As long as he is really coming to Handan, I will have his news within a few days."

Zhao Ya looks at him with regrets, "Why is Mister Dong suddenly showing love and concern for Zhao Ya?"

Xiang Shaolong's mind was blank. Stalling for time, he said, "Seriously speaking, I have heard rumours about Xiang Shaolong's incident and did not have a good opinion about Princess. I have a better opinion only last night when I found out that Princess is not a heartless and vicious woman."

Zhao Ya depressingly agreed, "Mister's reprimand is right. Zhao Ya is truly regretful. If not for some unfinished business, I would have committed suicide, avoiding this living-worse-than-death punishment."

Xiang Shaolong questioned, "What has Princess left unfinished?"

Zhao Ya threw him a stern gaze, "You seem to have no objection about my death."

Xiang Shaolong gave a bitter laugh, "A beauty's heart is the hardest to fathom. Since Princess is living a worse than death life, if I advised you not to die, wouldn't that make you suffer more? If Princess is not satisfied, that what kind of logic is that?"

Zhao Ya smiled charmingly, "Chatting with you is truly enjoyable. My door is always open to you. No matter when Mister feels like dropping by, Zhao Ya will wait for you wholeheartedly."

Xiang Shaolong could not bear it anymore, "In that case, you had better break Li Yuan's legs. I am not willing to wait outside your bedroom for hours."

Zhao Ya was dumbstruck. Knowing herself, it would be really difficult to decline Li Yuan. When she committed herself exclusively to Dong Kuang last night, it was because she was frantic over Xiang Shaolong's welfare. She would not be able to keep her word. Luckily, King Xiaocheng arrived followed by other guests so she was able to avoid answering this tough subject.

That night, King Xiaocheng frequently toasted Xiang Shaolong and decreed all officials to support Xiang Shaolong in expanding the farm. The party lasted till midnight before her left happily.

Zhao Zhi's desires are hard to withhold. Following Xiang Shaolong back to his Residence, they proceeded to use their time most effectively. Xiang Shaolong is so exhausted that he had to cancel his other romp with Ji Yanran. Early next morning, Ji Yanran could not wait any longer and came to visit him.

They were delighted to see each other again.

Ji Yanran led him to the back garden, strolling shoulder to shoulder, she informed, "Not only has your stunt caused Li Yuan to bang into a wall, even Tian Dan is starting to notice you. He believes that you are an extraordinary talent and may even try to recruit you."

Xiang Shaolong assumed with displeasure, "You make me feel that by mixing with Li Yuan and Tian Dan all the time, you are able to forecast their actions very well."

Ji Yanran giggled, "Do not be angry, husband. Yanran has been disobedient but my goal is only to collect intelligence for you. Now, Tian Dan and Li Yuan are exerting pressure on King Xiaocheng to withdraw his soldiers against the State of Yan. They are naturally afraid that after defeating Yan, their territory and standing will increase by a lot. This ending will be detrimental to Qi and Chu's conquests. Tian Dan is more

anxious, as the fall of Yan will mean that Zhao will surround the entire west border of Qi.”

Xiang Shaolong had a dreaded feeling. Forgetting to chide Yanran, he frowned, “That will be disastrous. If the Zhao soldiers do not retreat, the treaty will not be completed and Li Yuan will not leave Handan City. This will risk exposing my identity and my fake promise of more livestock.”

Ji Yanran cooed, “Don’t worry. Zhao Mu has been checking up on Tian Dan’s secret agenda for the past two days. He is even more alarmed than you.”

Xiang Shaolong stared at her in wonder, “You even found out about this!”

Ji Yanran laughingly fell into his embrace. Giving a tortured sighed, she said, “Yanran is elated that husband is jealous. Oh! No! Fearful is more correct. Yanran’s actions are to help husband from being the target. Yanran has successfully shifted Li Yuan’s hatred to Tian Dan. They appear to be good friends but are not really on good terms. As they fight to discuss governance with Yanran, it has allowed me to spy on their actions easily. If hubby feels than Yanran is wrong, you are free to punish me as you like.”

Xiang Shaolong understood that Ji Yanran has an independent character. Although she is smitten with himself, she will not submit blindly. Smiling bitterly, he advised, “Your better be careful. No matter how confident you are, you are still surrounded by tigers and wolves. Who would not wish to gain the fortune of bedding you?”

Ji Yanran was mesmerized, "Hubby is really good at sweet-talking. 'Fortune of bedding you' is such a nice phrase. All right! I have to make a move. Will you be as vicious tonight as what you were last night, making Yanran sleep alone? "

It has never crossed Xiang Shaolong's mind that she would even pursue the absence of one night. Feeling sweet in the heart and pain in the head, he made a solemn promised enquired, "I will not pretend to go to Hidden Army Valley to work on the farm. What are your plans?"

Ji Yanran whined, "The Zhao Queen has invited me on several occasions. I have run out of excuses and have to make this trip."

They finally parted dejectedly and Zhao Zhi went back to the training school on her own.

That night, he rushed back to Handan with Teng Yi. All the soldiers at the gate recognized him and allow him to enter without verification.

Jing Jun's girlfriend is beyond doubt an exquisite beauty. Enjoying her companionship, Jing Jun has forgotten all past relationships. Xiang Shaolong finally rest easy and left him at the farm.

After Wu Zhuo's management, the Hidden Army Valley farm is starting to take shape. More importantly, he had designated several strategic locations and prepared a few secret escape routes. In short, they are ready to turn the tables and flee anytime into the wild mountains and dense

vegetation. Once Zhao Mu is lured to this place, they can bring him back to Qin alive.

On the way back to the residence, Teng Yi reported, "I have send men to collect animals from all over the place. When our farm reaches a bigger scale, the time will be right to act."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in agreement.

The moment they stepped into the villa, Wu Guo welcomed them with a strange expression, "Third Madam is here!"

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi stared at each other. Exclaiming together, "Third Madam?!"

Wu Guo smiled indignantly, "Third Master's wife is Third Madam. Third Madam is pretty but not as pretty as her temper"

Teng Yi is disgruntled, "What crap are you talking about?"

Xiang Shaolong recalled Shan Rou's deadline. Lamenting that he is so occupied the past two days, how can he remember her comic warning. Hauling Teng Yi into the residence, he told him about this affair.

Teng Yi could feel the same headache coming. He proposed, "Coincidentally, we had a batch of war horses that came in yesterday. Let's just pretend she came along with the horse shipment. I'll see to it."

Xiang Shaolong countered, "Aren't you going to persuade your elder sister to give up the idea of becoming my wife?"

Teng Yi gave a pained expression, "You try to handle her first. I can tell that she is interested in you. Using hard and soft methods, your woman-handling skill should be able to manage her just right."

Casting their brotherhood to the wind, he disappeared.

Xiang Shaolong hardened his resolve and entered the inner chamber.

Before he could step in, he caught Shan Rou chiding, "What has the world become? There is not even a female maid here. You expect these rough and unruly men to serve me?"

Xiang Shaolong has just crossed the door ledge and his foot has yet to land when Shan Rou cried, "Hubby is back. You guys are done here. Now get lost!"

These four men are considered the cream of the cream, the best of the elite troops. They slipped out of the room hastily as if they have just offended the king himself.

Shan Rou has changed into a gorgeous gown. Her hair is tied up neatly in a bun and she looks grand and imposing. Her beauty made Xiang Shaolong's eyes pop out and can longer say another word. However, her arms on her waist pose will send fear into those who saw her.

Shan Rou giggled, "Hee! Do I look well disguised as your wife?"

Xiang Shaolong reached to her back and caught a whiff of her white neck. Praising her bewitching aroma, he frowned, "The deadline has yet to pass and you cannot wait to rush

here and masquerade as my wife. Is sister having the desire?"

Shan Rou raised her chiselled face and gave him a glance. Hesitating, she replied, "You can think whatever you like. I am definitely staying with you and almost motivate you at the same time."

Xiang Shaolong slipped to her side and purposely leaned on her shoulder. Nudging her lightly, he timidly asked, "Big sister, aren't you concern that the show becomes reality and I took advantage of you?"

Shan Rou purposely did not look at him at all. In an awe-inspiring manner, she quoted, "You can do whatever you want. People who undertake big tasks do not sweat the small stuff. Letting some fools take advantage is just part of the process."

Xiang Shaolong could not do anything to her. Infuriated, he shot, "Whoever is the one that is taking advantage of the other, Miss knows the truth in her heart!"

Shan Rou smiled sweetly. Turning around, she cuddles his firm and stout neck, her curvy and captivating breasts leaning on him without reservation. In a teasing voice, she raised, "Good hubby! When are you getting two maids to serve your wife?"

The wife of the reputable Dong Horse Fanatic surely deserves some maids.

Mad and humoured at the same instant, Xiang Shaolong is bowled over by her display of intimacy. Grabbing her thin waist, he unwillingly agreed, "You lass is just desperate to marry me but does not know to do to it without putting yourself down. You cannot even wait for just one more night; I can only resign myself to fate. After all, your brother-in-law is my second brother."

Shan Rou kept her cool and did not dispute with him. She conceitedly watched him and does not mind his caressing.

Xiang Shaolong pats his hand on her pert butt twice and moan, "Fine! I will transfer two maids from the outer chamber to serve you. But you have to behave yourself and check your temper. Do not flash your knives at the slightest discontent. Hai! With outsiders, I may have to sleep with you without taking off my mask."

Seeing that Xiang Shaolong has been forced into obeying her requests, she slipped out of his grasped gleefully. She pleasantly warned, "Who is sleeping with you? I will be sleeping next door. Don't blame me for not warning you beforehand. If there is any silly thief who steals into my bedroom, be prepared to face my flying daggers!"

Eyeing her as she disappeared into the corridor leading to the adjoining room, Xiang Shaolong shook his head and let out a long sigh. Having this forever-stubborn beauty at his side, he could foresee the arrival of many more troubles.

On the other hand, her present cheerful disposition is way better than the depressed and tortured-by-revenge outlook

before. Xiang Shaolong believed that he had done a good deed by giving in to her.

Honestly speaking, Xiang Shaolong is more attracted to Shan Rou than Zhao Zhi. Maybe this is the theory of the harder it is to achieve something; the more value is placed on it. While hesitating to follow her for a romp, Wu Guo came to report that Zhao Mu had sent for him.

Xiang Shaolong is mystified. Zhao Mu has earlier told him to meet up less often to minimise suspicions. Why did he send someone to fetch him now?

Arriving at the outer hall, his escort turned out to be Pu Bu.

Xiang Shaolong questioned, "Why has Marquis sent for me?"

Pu Bu replied respectfully, "Subordinate was here this morning only to find Mister Dong had left for Hidden Army Valley. Luckily, Master Dong is back. Marquis is hosting Chancellor Tian (Dan) tonight. Chancellor Tian has indicated that he wishes to meet Master Dong, so please leave with me. The horse carriage is waiting outside the gate."

Xiang Shaolong is anxious that he is about to meet the legendary history titan. Checking himself, he thought that titan is also a human. In hindsight, who is more famous than Qin Shihuang whom he is nurturing? Releasing his stress, he hurriedly changed and came to the main gate.

The courtyard is lined with fifty plus soldiers guarding a luxurious horse carriage, giving an imposing aura.

Xiang Shaolong smiled at Pu Bu, "Brother Pu! Come! Join me in the carriage and let's have a good chat!"

Pu Bu cannot decline and boarded the carriage with him.

After some idle chat, Pu Bu shone, "Master Dong is a great man who views life and death with fear. Our band of brothers thinks highly of you."

Xiang Shaolong cannot fathom that his risky feat will bring about so much goodwill, including Tian Dan's attention. He gave his humble thanks, "That is nothing. Just staking everything I have got and forcing the tiger to jump the wall." (Force the other party to act)

Pu Bu affirmed, "Other than Master Dong, subordinate has met another great hero. Please pardon me for not saying who he is."

In his heart, Xiang Shaolong recognized that this man is still loyal to himself.

Pu Bu enquired, "Why has Master Dong chosen Zhao to settle down?"

Xiang Shaolong jumped, "Does Brother Pu know that if word leaks out, you will lose your head?"

Biting his teeth, Pu Bu stated, "I know. But I appreciate that Master Dong is not that kind of person. I must ask or I will not be in peace."

Xiang Shaolong put his hand around his shoulder and leaned to his ear. He whispered, "Good brother! You have good eyesight because I am Xiang Shaolong!"

Pu Bu was floored. He tried to bend down and pay his respects. Xiang Shaolong held him back and using this opportunity, he disclosed his mission and the big plan for this trip. Pu Bu is mad with ecstasy and cursed fiercely, "That traitor Zhao Mu is inhuman. He is bad-tempered and has a cruel hand. At his whim, families are destroyed. We have been waiting for Master Xiang in agony!"

Xiang Shaolong calmly state, "His retribution is near."

By this time, the horse carriage has reached the Marquis's residence. Both men fixed the future methods of communication before alighting. The banquet location is the same hall where Xiang Shaolong first met Mohist Yan Ping. Since he came to Handan City, he has yet to hear about this man. He will inquire about him the next time he saw Zhao Zhi.

Thinking of Zhao Zhi, he chanced upon her coaching a bunch of top-grade song courtesans at her usual place.

Zhao Zhi caught his eye and signalled him to speak to her. Xiang Shaolong understood her wink and instructed Pu Bu to stop leading the way and wait for him at the side. Striding towards Zhao Zhi, he called, "How are you, Miss Zhi!"

The courtesans were awestruck by Shaolong's magnificent posture and their beautiful eyes lit up, not hiding their appreciation.

Zhao Zhi left the courtesan group and met him welcomingly. Strolling shoulder to shoulder, she informed, "Last night, Zhao Mu sent the Tian Zhen sisters into the palace to accompany the treacherous Chancellor. Tian Dan is full of praises and may demand them from Zhao Mu. Tian Zhen begged you to save them."

Xiang Shaolong nodded. "Got it! Tell them I will not sit by and do nothing."

Despite saying that, he had no idea how to save them.

Zhao Zhi almost treated Xiang Shaolong like a deity, believing that he will honour his words. Joyously, she added, "I already told them you are not a heartless man and will definitely help them."

Xiang Shaolong groaned internally and updated Shan Rou's intrusion.

Zhao Zhi covered her mouth chuckling, "Hubby Xiang is really great. I think sister is going wild over you."

Xiang Shaolong's heart trembled. "What about you?"

Zhao Zhi's petite face shone red and pretended to think deeply. She posed, "I, hmmm, want to be with you every minute."

Xiang Shaolong is originally composed but is affected but the twin's development. Collecting himself together, he returned to the corridor and made his way towards the inner hall.

CHAPTER 8

Chancellor Of Qi, Tian Dan

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

LIGHT shone through the inner hall and faint music can be heard.

Security is especially tight and scores of shadows can be seen everywhere.

Right outside the door of the inner hall, there are fifteen to sixteen sturdy and serious-looking Qi warriors. This is the first time Xiang Shaolong has seen such a parade at a banquet location.

Among them, there is a young and handsome swordsman who is especially majestic and carries an imposing air. His athletic frame appeared from the corridor garden and he marched over in big strides. Bowing, he greeted politely, "This must be the glamorous Mister Dong that Chancellor Tian has been eager to befriend. Your subject is Qi citizen Dan Chu, head of Chancellor Tian's personal bodyguards. I take this opportunity to wish Mister well."

Xiang Shaolong was awe-struck and returned the compliments.

Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi had mentioned Dan Chu before. He is Qi's famed general and possess outstanding swordsmanship. He truly matches up to his fame. He has a rare domineering spirit that emits right from his bones.

After the pleasantries, Dan Chu beamed at Pu Bu, "Brother Pu can hand over Mister to General."

Pu Bu was intimidated by his spirit and hastily agreed.

Dan Chu projected the posture of a guide and invited Xiang Shaolong to walk in front of him.

The gate keepers retreated to two sides and allow Xiang Shaolong to enter the inner hall.

At that instant, someone announced, "Mister Dong Kuang is here!"

Xiang Shaolong thought of the sword scar on Shan Rou's breasts and wondered how she managed to stay alive after trying to assassinate Tian Dan twice.

Xiang Shaolong crossed the door ledge and saw Tian Dan for the first time.

He knew it was Tian Dan not because of the two well-built and cool-looking Liu Zhongxia and Liu Zhongshi bodyguards cum brothers behind him; nor was it the full white outfit he wore that contrasted with the rest of the flowery costumes. It was because his spirits and complexion are hard to forget once you set your eyes on him.

He had heard about the Liu brothers from Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi.

No wonder Ji Yanran who has seen heroes from all over the world is also impressed with him.

Tian Dan is around forty with a slender frame with a high nose bone like an eagle's beak. Coupled with his high cheekbones, they form a threatening air. Adding his thick eyebrows and penetrating sharp eyes, he exudes leadership and dominance. It is no accident he managed to rise from a small official post and occupy one of the most powerful positions under the sky.

Seated beside him, the traitorous Zhao Mu looks like a kitten beside a tiger.

There are twenty people seated around the table. The biggest surprise Xiang Shaolong had was seeing the voluptuous Zhao Queen. Except for palace banquets, this is the first time he saw her at an official's private banquet. It seems that Tian Dan's status is high enough for her to make the concession.

Familiar faces like Guo Kai, Le Cheng and Zhao Ba are not present. Those present were Guo Zhong, Guo Xiu'er, Ji Zhong, Li Yuan, Han Chuang, Lord Longyang and Zhao Ya.

There were two Qi citizens. One of them is 'old friend' Qi Yu. Seated left of Zhao Ya, he spoke incessantly but Zhao Ya paid no attention to him.

The other is a knowledgeable and fine-looking scholar. With a wide and full forehead, he gives an intellectual impression.

A group of musicians were initially playing on the side. When Zhao Mu heard about Dong Kuang's arrival, he clapped and the ten over musicians left through the side door. The inner hall quietened.

Tian Dan's glare shot towards Xiang Shaolong like an arrow. Observing him, he was obviously shaken by his bearing. His eyes shone and he stood up. Putting his hand out, he chuckled, "People say fame is exaggerated. I say fame is understated. Finally, I get to make your acquaintance. What great fortune!"

Other than the three ladies, which are the Zhao Queen, Guo Xiu'er and Zhao Ya, the rest of the guests are forced to stand up and welcome Xiang Shaolong after seeing Tian Dan's example. Li Yuan is the most unwilling, but his attitude has improved probably due to Ji Yanran's effective strategy.

Xiang Shaolong respects Tian Dan for his open and easy-going nature. He did not put on any airs like Prince Xinling. If he were to compare both of them, Tian Dan won him by half a grade.

He increased his speed and paid his respects to Zhao Queen before he faced Tian Dan and shake his hand strongly with both hands.

Tian Dan's hands are wide and thick until the bones cannot be seen. Yet, they feel strong and warm.

The legendary character sized him up and grinned, "Imperial Uncle (Li Yuan) has told me on several occasions that Mister is not only great with horses but also highly-skilled with the sword!"

Xiang Shaolong looked over to Li Yuan unconsciously and forced a smile, nodding his head slightly.

Tian Dan gently commanded the Liu Brothers, "Add a seat beside me for Brother Dong!"

In the same breath, he introduced Qi Yu and Tian Bang, the military advisor. Tian Bang seems to be related to Tian Dan.

After the commotion, everybody settled down again.

Footsteps sounded and Tian Zhen and Tian Feng emerged out of nowhere and started to fill up the wine cups. By using these two girls to serve the guests, one can tell how much importance he placed on Tian Dan.

Tian Feng did not appear to know Xiang Shaolong's real identity. Although she peeped at him, there was no change in her composure. Tian Zhen has kept her promise to Xiang Shaolong and has even withheld the secret from her own sister. Based on this alone, Xiang Shaolong felt responsible for her.

When Tian Zhen is pouring wine for Xiang Shaolong, her delicate hands actually trembled.

While other guests are chatting with their partners, it did not escape Tian Dan's eyes. He questioned, "Why is Little Zhen so nervous?"

After he spoke, everyone was focusing on Tian Zhen.

When Tian Zhen saw Xiang Shaolong, it is like seeing a light in the ocean of suffering. Misery swirled through her heart and she lost her calm. Interrogated by Tian Dan, she thought she had exposed Xiang Shaolong. She panicked and the bronze jug crashed onto the table and wine splashed over Xiang Shaolong's vest.

Zhao Mu's countenance changed and was about to hurl abuses.

Xiang Shaolong gave a big laugh and supported the terrified and shaking Tian Zhen. Soothingly, he coaxed, "It's Ok. It's Ok. Beauty, please don't take it to heart."

Lowering his head for a whiff, he exclaimed, "Good wine!"

Everyone was humoured and have a good laugh.

Zhao Queen joked, "People drink wine. Mister Dong sniffs wine."

As Tian Zhen is propped up by Xiang Shaolong on her back and hand, she cooled down and believed that this long awaited gentleman will protect her well.

Zhao Mu knows that it is not a time to blame her and ordered lightly, "Dismiss yourself."

Both girls kneel down to pay their respects and withdraw to the back.

Zhao Mu looks like he has something to say to him. Standing up, he invited, "Mister Dong, please come with me. I trust that my clothes should fit your body."

Xiang Shaolong excused himself and left with him.

Once they stepped out, Zhao Mu spoke in a low voice, "I have investigated Tian Dan's intentions. He is quite offended with King Xiaocheng. He hinted that if I can overthrow Zhao, he will do his best to lend a hand."

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed, IDIOT! For Tian Dan, a chaotic Zhao will give him more opportunities.

Instead, he proclaimed, "What is the deal with Qi Yu? Why did he leak your relationship (with Tian Dan) to Zhao Ya?"

This is a pre-emptive tactic.

Zhao Mu sighed, "Don't simply discount Zhao Ya as a free for all. In actual fact, she is more intelligent and powerful than anyone. Qi Yu only needs to say a wrong sentence and she will blackmail him."

Reaching the inner chamber, Zhao Mu got fresh new clothes for Xiang Shaolong to change.

Xiang Shaolong intentionally mentioned, "Marquis is truly resourceful. Acquiring these twin beauties that look exactly like each other is no easy feat."

Zhao Mu's face showed dilemma. Sighing, "Why don't you say so earlier? Tian Dan tried them last night and was showering with praises. Needless to say, I have presented them to him. How can I break my promise now?"

Xiang Shaolong's heart sank to the bottom and his face showed total disappointment.

Zhao Mu has regarded him as his confidante and able assistant. Frowning he suggested, "These is an alternative. And success will depend on how important are you to Tian Dan."

When they returned to the banquet, the courtesans have just finished performing.

Lord Longyang haughtily hit on Xiang Shaolong, "Mister Dong's luxurious clothes have made me look at you differently!"

Winking at him, he continued, "Marquis has promised to bring Mister Dong to attend to my sick horses. Why has he not made good his word?"

Everyone witnessed Xiang Shaolong's embarrassment and felt sorry but hilarious at the same time.

Zhao Mu knows that Xiang Shaolong is straight and laughed, "Mister Dong is always running off to the farm. How can I grab hold of him?"

Tian Dan joined in the laughter.

Digging Lord Longyang, "If it is only for horses, I have a few vets. Of course they are not as good as Brother Dong but we can let them have a try first and see if they can solve the problem on behalf of the expert."

Lord Longyang recognized that Tian Dan is jesting with him. "Hiyah!" He cried and gave him a look.

Tian Bang the scholar approached Xiang Shaolong, "My country has a horse named Playful. It runs like the wind and nobody has been able to tame it. We have tried both hard and soft tactics but to no avail. Since we have the good fortune to meet, I wish to consult Mister."

Once spoken, even Tian Dan furrowed his eyebrows, knowing that he is out to make things difficult.

How can anyone predict how to tame a horse without laying his eyes on the horse beforehand? But if Xiang Shaolong said he needs to see the horse first, it becomes a lame excuse that anyone could have given and does not add to his reputation.

Amazingly, Xiang Shaolong answered at leisure, "In The Art of Horse Taming, the initial step is to make it defenceless against you. But this is a low method used by common folks. The best would be to make them view you as equals and treat them with utmost care. The wildest horse will start to listen and cooperate."

Mentioning this, he could not help but look opposite to Zhao Ya who is seated between Qi Yu and Han Chuang. This beauty that he shared a love-hate relationship is paying attention to him intently. Catching his eyes and reminding herself that he had once compared her to a horse (at the banquet where XSL first saw Ji Yanran in Handan), she started to feel uncomfortable and bat him an eye.

Tian Dan's interest is piqued, "Humans are humans. Animals are animals. How can you treat an animal like a human?"

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "They are many methods. A newborn animal will regard their parents as the first being that comes into contact with them. If you have any doubts, you can feel free to experiment with a bunch of newborn ducklings and you will agree that I am not kidding."

His words carry logic and it has been proven by modern psychology.

Everyone begin marvelling at this enlightenment.

Han Chuang helped, "No wonder there are stories of babies that have been abandoned in the wild and brought up by wolves. They became werewolves and treated wolves like their birth parents. Mister Dong is definitely a first class animal expert! "

Seeing that everyone nodded in consensus, Li Yuan is still unconvinced and interrupted, "Master Tian's Playful Jade Horse is no longer a newborn. We cannot employ this method anymore. Does Mister Dong have a suitable strategy?"

Everyone in the dining hall, including Tian Dan is well aware of the animosity between the two of them. Li Yuan is long expected to make Dong Kuang look bad. They look to see how this Horse Fanatic will counter him.

Xiang Shaolong leaned forward and deepened his voice. Secretively, he announced, "I have a horse-taming methods that never fails. All along it is my hidden weapon and I have never told a second person about it. Since today is such a joyous occasion, allow me to showcase my talent and honour Chancellor Tian!"

Everyone unconsciously leaned forward and await his big revelation.

Xiang Shaolong gradually started, "It is pretty simple actually but it will not be easy unless you are a horse lover."

Holding the suspense of his audience, everyone's hearts begin to itch.

Knowing that everyone is addicted to his words, he divulges, "It is to sleep with the horse and he will loosen his guard against you and regard you as his own kind."

Initially, everyone is astounded. Comprehending the logic, they cried, "Excellent!"

Xiang Shaolong theory is backed by science. He learned from a television documentary about a wild animal tamer who confesses that he often sleeps with beasts. Using this technique, they will really accept you one of their family and no longer guard against you.

This is another difference between modern men and ancient men.

The twenty-first century is the boom of the information age. One only needs to sit at home and surf the internet and one will be able to gain access and utilise plenty of resources from all over the world and different periods in history.

Ancient men travelled all over the place and relied on precious books written on bamboo stems or on word of mouth. Compared to Xiang Shaolong who came from the 21st Century where data is prevalent, he has transformed into a know-it-all.

Tian Dan slapped the table and professed his highest regard, "Come! Let us toast to Dong Kuang's enlightenment through years of hard experience!"

Qi Yu added, "Now we all realize why Mister has been crowned the champion of all horse fanatics"

Everyone raised their cups and joined in the toasting.

Li Yuan banged into another wall and toned down his hostility. He dared not belittle his opponent and start thinking of another scheme.

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng emerged again and started filling up the wine cups.

After the twins retreated, Zhao Mu winked at Xiang Shaolong and faced Tian Dan smilingly, "Chancellor Tian and Mister Dong not only hit it off well but shared the same

interests. Both are keen on the twins and after Mister Dong realised that they belonged to Chancellor Tian... ..”

Xiang Shaolong cackling interrupted, “Beauty going to the Ruler, I only offer congratulations and not a hint of jealousy.”

Zhao Mu is pleased with his words and silently praised his timely interruption. Now it is up to Tian Dan to see if he is willing to let go of the twins.

Tian Dan is no common man. Generously, he joked, “Since brother Dong has such interests, I will transfer both of them to you as a welcome gift. This will give Mister Dong more than just horses for sleeping companions.”

Such acts of generosity are common among high ranking officials and come as surprise to no one.

Xiang Shaolong purposely rejected his proposal but Tian Dan will not hear the end of it. With great relief, he gave his utmost thanks.

Zhao Mu intentionally showed goodwill to Xiang Shaolong. He summoned the two girls and instructed, “From this moment, both of you will be sent to Master Dong instead of Chancellor Tian as gifts. Perform your duty with care, diligence and perfect obedience.”

Both girls were initially shocked.

Tian Zhen is smart. Lowering her head to hide her gratitude and glee, she kneeled and gave her thanks.

Tian Feng performed appropriately. Her face turning pink, she stole a look at her new master and kneeled down.

Zhao Mu ordered simply, "Go and pack your belongings now and wait for Master Dong to bring you home."

Zhao Queen sniggered, "With these pair of jade-liked maidens, Mister Dong must not forget to sleep with the horses."

Xiang Shaolong had hugged her one. Sensing the emotions in her words, his heart stirred.

Keeping quiet all this while, Guo Xiu'er gazed at Xiang Shaolong with her appealing eyes and asked, "Has Mister Dong really accompanied horses to sleep?"

Xiang Shaolong detected the innocence in her tone and replied warmly, "Of course. I have been sleeping with horses since I was seven. We did not sleep in the stable but in my bedroom."

Everyone was greatly amused and burst out in guffaws.

Li Yuan smirked at Lord Longyang and challenged, "I want to speak up for Lord Longyang. After the sword duel, Talented Lady Ji needed help with her horse and Brother Dong went to her assistance immediately. Why has Lord Longyang received inferior treatment?"

This incident is new to Tian Dan and he raised his concentration.

Lord Longyang could not hide his bitterness and shot Xiang Shaolong a look, making all his hairs stand up.

Xiang Shaolong released a heavy sigh and apologised, "Imperial Uncle is correct. I should not have left that day. Talented Lady Ji got me to discuss about songs and poems and I disappointed her greatly. I dare not face her in the future."

Everyone knows of Ji Yanran's characteristics. Notwithstanding those who still bear grudges against him, most of those present have reduced their jealousy towards him.

This Dong Horse Fanatic is strikingly charming. Regardless of the occasion, he is able to grab the centre of attraction. Luckily he is a boor or he may even entice Ji Yanran.

Accepting his automatic retreat, Li Yuan greatly reduced his enmity and toasted him sincerely for the first time.

The atmosphere is back in harmony.

Only Zhao Ya still subtly suspects that things are not so simple between him and Ji Yanran.

Those present at the banquet consists of powerful representatives from Qi, Chu, Han, Zhao, Wei and Eastern Zhou (Yan?). The conversation topics naturally drifted to the common enemy Qin.

Ji Zhong analysed the Qin situation and explained, "We have allied on several occasions but still failed to defeat them. The main rationale is that Qin has used the terrain well and

constructed crucial Passes. They have Han Gu Pass, Hu Lao Pass, Yao Sai Pass in the east and Wu Pass in the southeast. As long as we can break through one of them and continue to advance, what further resistance does the Qin have?"

During the Spring-Autumn Warring period, chariot battles are fought on plain land. After war developed into infantry (foot soldiers) and cavalry (on horseback), the Passes become even more important. They play a life-death role in the fate of Qin.

Ji Zhong appears to be highlighting the Qin's prowess but is actually identifying the strongest and potentially weakest point.

In this manner, he is taking the chance to unite everyone and destroy Qin.

Tian Dan smilingly retort, "A country's size, ruler, economy and army cannot be discussed separately. In my opinion, Qin is putting up a strong front but is weak internally. After Bai Qi's death, there is no strong general in Qin. Lu Buwei is managing the court affairs but is not on good terms with the military. I dare guarantee that as long as this person is the Prime Minister, the Qin people are disunited. If we raise a campaign against Qin, the threat of foreign aggression will unite the Qin people and turn the tables against us. Does anyone see my point of view?"

Ji Zhong is dumbstruck and his face darkened.

Guo Zhong asked, "So I assume Chancellor Tian is against this collective agreement?"

The hope of this agreement is his last hope for staying in Zhao. If it fails, he will have to relocate somewhere else.

Although Xiang Shaolong highly regarded his insight, he sighed inwardly that no matter how brilliant one is, he can never foretell what may develop in the future. King Zhuangxiang has only three more years to live. When Xiao Pan, the Qin Shihuang, takes his place on the throne, there will be no one under the sky who can hold a candle to him.

Tian Dan gently replied, "Of course not. The agreement has to go ahead. But the strategies and methods has to be discussed in great detail. Otherwise, I would not have made the long journey here."

When he speaks, his words carry a natural intimidation and nobody dared to rebut him. At the same time, countering him may result in being put down further.

Lord Longyang shrieked in a high pitch voice, "Chancellor Tian is so familiar with the Qin's activity; can you update us on what has occurred to Xiang Shaolong? Many of us here are interested to know if any calamity has befallen him."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. Since his return to Handan, his name has been mentioned here and there but was never brought out as a topic for discussion.

Zhao Mu's eyes shone fiercely when he heard his name.

Zhao Ya turned a shade paler but exhibits a keen curiosity.

Zhao Queen's eyes lit up and increased her concentration.

Qi Yu gave a cold snort as he hated Xiang Shaolong to the bone.

Masking his thoughts well, Tian Dan happily said, "Xiang Shaolong is not a simple man. He manages to come out tops every time. Even my old friend Brother Wuji is turning in his grave after being tricked by him. The rest of his story is well-known to the rest of you."

Wuji is Prince Xinling's real name.

Han Chuang peeped at the dazed Zhao Ya besides him and began to feel jealous. Unsatisfied he cried, "Is Chancellor Tian exaggerating? I think this creep is probably just lucky he got away!"

Tian Dan affirmed, "Knowing yourself and your enemy, you can fight and win every single battle. I hate him to the core but must never belittle him. Xiang Shaolong had barely reached Qin but his accomplishments are accumulating quickly. In front of Qin King and all major officials, he proved to be a good match against Qin's number one strongman Wang Jian. Using his weapon's edge, Xiang Shaolong untiringly deflected his enemy's arrows. His arrows are shot from an iron bow and can even penetrate a shield. I guess he is giving way in order to preserve the dignity of the military. Qin King immediately promoted him to be the Grand Tutor and Lu Buwei gained a lot of prestige from him. If he is not eliminated, Lu Buwei will be like a tiger with wings. Given time, he will control the entire Qin Court."

Ji Zhong smile chillingly, "From what you have said, Qin should not have a shortage of people who wanted him dead."

Tian Dan laughed coldly, "If Xiang Shaolong is an easy target, he would have died numerous times. Qin assassins have tried to harm him but suffered a great blow and even lost a few men. Now that the Wu Family is becoming more and more influential in Qin is also due to Xiang Shaolong. Even the Qin military that are anti-Lu Buwei are changing their opinion about him and are trying to win him over to their side."

Guo Zhong revealed an envious expression on his face but he could not say anything.

Listening, Xiang Shaolong could feel his entire body turning cold. Tian Dan would not be so foolish to divulge all his information. But just analyzing what he has alleged, his facts are accurate as if he had been there to witness the event himself. This man is deadly efficient and like what he believed in – Knowing your enemy and knowing yourself and never belittle your enemy, are the ways of the Victorious!

Zhao Mu may have gotten the news of his arrival from Tian Dan.

Zhao Queen laughed coquettishly, "I don't believe he cannot be defeated, he does not have three heads and six arms." Finishing, she purposely threw a glance at Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya turned a shade of anger.

From these two reactions, Xiang Shaolong knew that these two girls are having some disagreement.

Qi Yu started, "Of course we have a plan to fix him. Chancellor Tian... .."

Tian Dan made a sound of displeasure and Qi Yu was frightened into silence.

Everyone was staring at Tian Dan and knew that he had a good plan to deal with Xiang Shaolong.

Tian Dan declared, "Everyone has a weakness. Xiang Shaolong's weakness is he placed too much importance on relationships and is too soft. This will be the cause of his downfall."

Guo Xiu'er's eyes turned confused. Thinking to herself, this is a strength; when has it become a weakness?

Thinking that Xiang Shaolong is on his way to Handan City, Zhao Ya began to feel anxious and looked at Dong Horse Fanatic pleadingly.

Xiang Shaolong is both edgy and amused. Hearing how everyone is pondering hard on how to deal with him, he felt distasteful and funny and the same time. Fortunately, no one noticed him.

The banquet is concluding and Tian Dan left first with Zhao Queen and Ji Zhong. Before he went, he bid his fond farewell to Xiang Shaolong reluctantly and promised to meet up in near future. Under the heavy protection of his personal guard, he boarded his carriage and rode off.

Zhao Mu has wanted Xiang Shaolong to stay and chat but he was hampered by the large crowd of guests. He also feared that Zhao Ya would see through their relationship. Helpless, he reminded, "The pair of beauties are awaiting Mister Dong in the horse carriage. The journey may take some time so do take this opportunity to inspect the goods."

All the guys who heard him laugh out loud.

Li Yuan had wanted to accompany Zhao Ya and be fresh with her. Seeing her coldness and invited by Guo Zhong to share his carriage, he departed unwillingly.

Lord Longyang saw them boarding the same carriage and joked, "Seems like the Guo Family will soon have an Imperial Uncle son-in-law."

As his carriage went past Xiang Shaolong, he batted an eyelid and him and groaned, "I had wanted to share your carriage but Mister Dong had female companions. Why not I visit Mister tomorrow?"

Han Chuang looked elsewhere, reluctant to witness Xiang Shaolong's distress.

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "So sorry. I still have to work at the farm tomorrow!"

Lord Longyang added with pleasure. "Even better. I'm sick of the city and would love to wander around. I will look for you at dawn."

Not waiting for his reply, he rode off.

Xiang Shaolong could feel all his goose bumps standing and stood there in a daze.

Zhao Mu patted his shoulder and recommended, "Want me to teach you a few tricks to take care of him?"

Xiang Shaolong sourly reassured, "Thanks for Marquis concern. But I'll be fine."

Zhao Mu and Han Chuang grinned.

The quiet and flustered Zhao Ya softly invited, "Marquis Han, please proceed home first!" but did not give a further explanation.

Seeing her icy demeanour, the hot and passionate Han Chuang lost half his enthusiasm. Harboured hatred and yet powerless, he left with disappointment.

Leaving only Zhao Mu, Zhao Ya and Xiang Shaolong, the atmosphere became slightly embarrassing.

Xiang Shaolong knew in his heart that Princess Zhao Ya was frustrated by the updates of himself. She wanted to approach him and get the matter off her chest. On the same note, she would want to know how he is progressing with his plan to prevent him from coming to Handan City. Remembering the tigress in his residence, he dare not invite her home and create more complications.

In addition, he has vowed to visit Ji Yanran and could not have Zhao Ya over. The worst issue is Lord Longyang's visit tomorrow. Even if he is made of iron, he cannot satisfy so many people.

Though he sympathises with Zhao Ya's condition, he can only offer, "It's late! Let me escort Princess to her carriage."

Zhao Ya looked at him faintly and did not agree or disagree. On her own, she stepped ahead to her own convoy of servants and horse carriage.

Xiang Shaolong rushed to her side but Zhao Ya boarded straight into her booth and did not say a single word.

Xiang Shaolong is afraid of Zhao Mu holding him back. Taking the opening, he waved goodbye to him and slipped into his aromatic carriage booth, diving into the wonderful and lively paradise created by the Tian sisters.

CHAPTER 9

Unpredictable Woman

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

HE had just boarded his horse carriage when the twin sisters leaped into his embrace without a care in the world and start to cry happily.

In the confusion, Xiang Shaolong could not tell them apart. Cuddling and consoling, he finally got them to calm down.

One of them disobeyed, “You kept us waiting in agony.”

Xiang Shaolong concluded, “You are Tian Feng!”

The horse carriage had left the Marquis Residence for a while when it suddenly halted.

Xiang Shaolong got the two girls to behave properly. Stretching his head out of the window, he inquired, "What is going on?"

His escort Pu Bu came from the front and reported, "Princess Ya's convoy has stopped in front of us and invited Mister to go over."

Xiang Shaolong could feel a tremendous headache coming but he is powerless to do anything. Soothingly, he patted the exquisite faces of the two girls and jumped down the carriage. Before he left, he ordered, "Protect the carriage well and follow me."

Finishing, he stride towards Zhao Ya's stationary carriage in big steps.

The carriage start to move off but they are heading to Xiang Shaolong's place instead.

The two of them sat side by side.

Zhao Ya has a wooden expression and remained in silence for a long while.

Just as Xiang Shaolong was starting to feel awkward, Zhao Ya faintly cried, "Dong Kuang! Tell me! You are not lecherous by nature. But why did you pay so much attention to the Tian Sisters?"

Xiang Shaolong was feeling fearful that Zhao Ya is very suspicious of him. He had once made love to the Tian sisters and Zhao Ya knew about it.

Although he has more confidence that Zhao Ya will not betray him again, this matter concerns the lives of a few hundred people. He cannot act on his own wistfulness and abandon his train of thought. Moreover, he has yet to fully comprehend the degree of loyalty she has towards King Xiaocheng.

Fearing that he will deny, she continued, "Knowing that they belonged to Tian Dan, Zhao Mu and you signalled each other and wrestle them back. This is unlike your usual way of doing things! Otherwise, you would have accepted the courtesans from Zhao King."

Totally lost, Xiang Shaolong illogically retort, "I have no idea what you are talking about!"

In an angered and pitiful voice, she cried softly, "Shaolong! Are you still pretending that you do not know me? Do you want me to die in front of you?"

Xiang Shaolong was filled with sorrow but hardened his heart as she is too fickle-minded.

Strengthening his resolution, he mock surprise and exclaimed, "My God! So you have mistaken old Dong to be another person. Come, examine my face and see if I am wearing any disguise."

Using the oldest trick in the box, he deceived her as she had never seen such a well made mask.

Zhao Ya's delicate body trembled. She was baffled and disappointed and dare not touch his face. Still shaking, she tried, "You are really not him?"

Xiang Shaolong had applied 'love seed' scent. Challenging, he proposed, "If you still have doubts, you can smell my scent. Every horse smells different and humans are the same. Come!"

Moving forward, he exposed his neck to her nostrils.

Zhao Ya sniffed twice and discovered a new but refreshing scent that leaves a deep impression on her. Disappointed, she grunted and like avoiding scorpions, she withdrew to the other side of the carriage and leaned on the window. Curious, she asked, "Then why are you eager to possess them?"

Xiang Shaolong has a burst of inspiration and grumbled, "It is all because of that tigress. Leaving Chu, I had wanted to avoid her for a while. How would I predict that she would single-handedly pursue all the way to Handan City? She threw a huge tantrum and even wanted two maidservants. Seeing that the two sisters would serve her fine, I requested them from Zhao Mu. If I knew they belonged to Tian Dan, I would have asked for any other two girls and it will be good enough. Alas, Marquis misunderstood my intentions and tried his best to interfere, causing this mess and your misunderstanding."

Inquisitively, he pondered, "What has the sisters got to do with Xiang Shaolong?"

Zhao Ya's face is void of colour. Her pretty eyes were shining at the peak of excitement and cheer. In an instant, they dimmed to disillusion and depression. Turning her head fiercely, she wallowed, "Please leave!"

Coincidentally, the horse carriage has stopped at the main gate of his residence.

Sighing inwardly, Xiang Shaolong alighted.

Shan Rou had not expected Xiang Shaolong to come home with two similar looking beauties. Entering the inner hall, she saw his gloomy face and asked in an unpleasant tone, "Where the hell have you been? You should inform me if you have to go out."

Xiang Shaolong is troubled over Zhao Ya. Impatiently, he shouted, "You saw me changing in my room. You think I do not know that you are sneakily spying on me?!"

Both Tian Zhen and Tian Feng were startled and their pretty faces lost all colour. Terrified, the two sisters stared at them.

Xiang Shaolong realised he had overreacted. Before he had a chance to make up, Shan Rou put her hands on her waist and anger was written on her face. Short of brandishing her knives, she snapped, "Who is sneaky? Do you only change when you have a damn banquet? Can't you change to shower? Can't you change to pee?"

With a snort, she covered her mouth and could not stop laughing. Batting an eye at him, she ended, "That's all!"

Seeing the matter is resolved, Xiang Shaolong is relieved. He did not want the Tian ladies to undergo any frightening situations. They are all lonely and vulnerable and cannot withstand any shock.

Joining in the laughter, he praised, "Great acting, Sister Rou. Even I was convinced that you are really my wife."

Hearing these two lines, Shan Rou faced darkened.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly filled with glee. Acting surprised, he declared, "You do not let me touch you and yet you wanted to be my real wife; how can such a deal exist?"

Shan Rou glared straight at him. She resembled a wounded beast which is ready to bite, showing her vicious yet adorable self.

Xiang Shaolong instantaneously softened. Hand around her shoulder, he promised, "Say you love me and let us soar through the skies together!"

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng finally come to the conclusion that they are teasing each other and find them very fascinating.

Shan Rou's complexion turned loving and arms still on her waist, her view landed on these two alluring sisters. Pointing, she asked, "Who are they?"

Xiang Shaolong was afraid that she will vent her anger on the two girls. Slipping behind her, he caressed her sweet

smelling shoulders and replied in the tenderest voice, "They are the maids who are here to serve the wife of myself, The Horse Fanatic Dong Kuang!"

Tian Zheng and Tian Feng obediently kneeled down and pay their respects.

Shan Rou was overjoyed. "Get up," she commanded. And shouted, "Wu Guo!"

Wu Guo nearly appeared as soon as her voice thundered. He was obviously eavesdropping outside the door.

Shan Rou let out another command, "Bring those luggages outside to my adjoining room now!"

Facing the Tian sisters, she added, "Go and tell them to place your luggage nicely."

The Tian sisters have gotten the Madam's permission to stay on and they left in a great mood. As long as they are with Xiang Shaolong, they are willing to endure all kinds of hardship.

Only this 'real imposter' is left in the inner hall.

Witnessing that the Tian sisters have overcome the obstacle, his mood improved. Kissing her fine face, he laid out, "Is wifey satisfied now? You wanted a husband, you got one. You wanted maids and there they are!"

Shan Rou was humoured by him but she kept her icy look. She snubbed, "We are not laying a beauty trap; why have

you gotten such first class beauties? Judging by their elegance, I think it is better that I serve them instead.”

Xiang Shaolong frowned, “Are you jealous?”

Shan Rou’s excellent and small lips curled at the corner, “This is not jealousy. This is logical deduction. What good can come out from a lecher?”

Despite her harsh tone, she did not protest Xiang Shaolong’s caressing of her shoulders and back. For a masculine beauty like her, it is actually a sign of consent but she is unwilling to say so verbally.

Xiang Shaolong saw through her and was amused and annoyed at the same time. Thinking hard, he pleaded, “Good Rou Rou! Please obey me. These two sisters are very pitiful. Having been insulted and tortured by Zhao Mu, this is their new freedom. I must definitely give them a blissful and happy future. If you disbelieve, you can always verify with Little Zhi Zhi. She will relate their story to you.”

Shan Rou was touched and lowered her pretty face, maintaining silence.

Xiang Shaolong turned her over and let her face himself. Pressing his lips, he was about to kiss her.

Shan Rou put up a violent struggle and escaped. Red-faced and dazed, she decreed, “You think I am Zhi Zhi; following you without question? After eliminating Zhao Mu, we will go our separate ways. Don’t think you are the only man for me.”

Knowing she is just using tough words, Xiang Shaolong still find it unbearable and shot back, "Going on separate ways is all right with me. Must I kneel down and beg you to spare me some love? Be careful that I will divorce you in the heat of my anger and kick you out of the Dong family. Ha!"

Finishing the last part, he could not hold it any longer and burst out laughing.

Shan Rou face was about to darken but seeing his comics, she had to laugh too. Swiftly straightening her cute face, she warned icily, "Miss has no intention to go against you and is retiring now. If I detect any thief breaking into my bedroom, I will kill first and ask later. Don't say that I did not give you this warning."

Closing, she levelled her chest and sauntered gracefully into the corridor leading to the back.

Xiang Shaolong thanked the heavens that she did not enter his room. Otherwise, he would not have any more energy to please Ji Yanran who has recently tasted the forbidden fruit and is dying for his attention.

At this point in time, he discovered that Shan Rou had inadvertently facilitated him to forget about Zhao Ya's incident.

Shan Rou's charm is indeed world class, definitely the hottest type.

As Xiang Shaolong was walking towards the Tian sisters' bedroom, Wu Guo and a few elite soldiers were humouring

the two girls, making them laugh like a blossoming flower. When Xiang Shaolong entered, they quickly left.

As Wu Guo passed Xiang Shaolong, he whispered, "Amazingly, this world can produce a pair of similar looking beauties. Absolutely a prized possession."

Adding a huge sigh, he led the 'porters' away.

The two girls are kneeling on the floor, awaiting Xiang Shaolong's instructions.

Seeing their heads pressed down on the floor, and their high collar exposing their snow white necks followed by their enthralling back, Xiang Shaolong experienced a strong surge in emotions.

Xiang Shaolong dedicated himself to aid Xiao Pan to conquer the world and build a strong China. However, the non-supportive cultures and traditions are things that he still cannot change overnight.

The lowly status of female slaves has to go on until the Nineteenth and Twentieth century before they are abolished.

The only thing he can do is to treat the females around him with love and care. He admired Mozi for he is the bright light of knowledge, illuminating these ancient times. His 'universal love' is to counteract long established vices of society. It is deplorable that most rulers chose to adopt rituals and ceremonies and further lowered the status of women. Thinking that the issue has been buried in darkness

for over two thousand years, he cannot help but feel sadness for all women.

Xiang Shaolong approached them and lifted them from the floor. Lovingly, he put his arms around their slender waists and they sat on the couch together. Softly, he stated, "I have yet to really talk to both of you. I am unlike Zhao Mu. My only rule is that you need not kneel and greet me and in the bedroom, there is even less need to do so."

Blushingly, one of them spoke, "Master Xiang has put us in a difficult position; we are totally willingly to serve Master Xiang well and make you delighted!"

Xiang Shaolong recognized the deep dimple on her face. Like he had won the lottery, he cried happily, "You are Tian Feng!"

Both girls covered their mouths and giggled charismatically. Behaving in the same fascinating manner, Xiang Shaolong was swept off his feet by the display and could not move his sight away from them.

Appreciating, Tian Zhen cried, "Master!"

Xiang Shaolong corrected, "Address me as Master Dong for the time being and be careful not to let the cat out of the bag!"

Both girls were taken aback and obediently agreed.

Observing their reaction and submissive nature, Xiang Shaolong discerns that this change is hard for them. Astonished, he gave them each a comforting long kiss.

Amidst their strong responses, he can finally tell the difference.

Tian Zhen is gentle; Tian Feng is wild.

Xiang Shaolong was in complete ecstasy and forgotten where he was.

Tian Zhen commented considerably, "Master Dong should be exhausted, let us serve you in showering and changing. We are well-versed in massaging and Tui-Na (accupoint massage), oh....."

Her small mouth has locked with Xiang Shaolong's once again.

Separating, Xiang Shaolong smiled, "I would love to enjoy your Tui-Na but I still have things to attend to. You girls go ahead and wash up and have a good rest. I will shower and share your room tomorrow night and make great love to both of you."

Hearing his words, both girls are over the moon, rejoicing in complete safety and bliss for the first time in their lives.

Tian Feng teased, "Does Master Dong know I have always envied elder sister who managed to copulate with Master Dong? Since you left, we have been pining for you every day and night. We chatted about you whenever we are alone and can only be happy when we meet you in our dreams."

Xiang Shaolong was praised to the skies like he was some deity. Curious, he asked, "We have only met once; why have you taken such strong fancy to me?"

Tian Zhen joyfully exclaimed, "Master Dong is not the same as anyone. You truly care from the heart. We have never seen a hero like yourself. The staff from Marquis's residence often gossiped about your exploits. When we heard about your legendary prowess and your wondrous escape from Handan City, we were exhilarated beyond imagination."

Tian Feng continued, "We thought we would never see Master Dong anymore. It is our great fortune that Heaven has finally heard our prayers and ultimately let us serve Master Dong."

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to caress them. Recollecting Ji Yanran, he suppressed his desire. If he starts any activity with them, he would be too worn out to go anywhere else. While he is still in control of himself, it is best to leave.

Just as he was about to pacify them with a few words and slip out, Shan Rou materialized at the open door of the bedroom. A cold and emotionless face, she directed icily, "Dong Kuang! Get out here! I need to talk to you."

Up till this point in time, the Tian sisters still do not have a clear idea on the ambiguous relationship between Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou. Traumatized, they kneeled down on the floor and beg for forgiveness from the 'real imposter wife'.

Shan Rou hurriedly explained, "This does not concern you, please get up!"

Xiang Shaolong helplessly pacified them with a few words and ordered them to shower and rest. He then followed Shan Rou to her room next door.

This inner chamber holds a total of four spacious rooms. The four of them have taken up three rooms, leaving one vacant. With her back facing him and her arms folded in front of her chest, she looked out of the window. Staring at the little garden illuminated by moonlight, she mentioned coldly, "Xiang Shaolong, I cannot fall asleep!"

"What?!" Xiang Shaolong was bowled over.

Stamping her feet, she unreasonably threatened, "Are you deaf? Help me to fall asleep now!"

Xiang Shaolong moved his well-built body and attaches himself to her enticing backbone. Looping his two strong hands around her slender but alarmingly supple and flexible waist, he remembered their first encounter. She had mistaken him for Zhao Mu and carried out a fumbling and embarrassing assassination. Sweet feelings arise in his heart. Xiang Shaolong smooches her jade neck, he suggested, "Allow me to undress you and coax my darling you into the deepest slumber?"

Shan Rou did not resist his invasion and harassment. Twisting her waist, she yelled, "Who wants you to coax? You did not close your door and expose me to all your sweet talking. The noise unsettled my nerves and causes my insomnia!"

Stunned, Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "If you have closed your own door, how would you have heard our whisperings?"

Shan Rou's faced reddened. Maintaining her nonsense, she retorted, "What has my door's opening or closing has to do with you?!"

Xiang Shaolong joked, "Good Sister is jealous. Come! Let me also kiss your chirpy mouth and make them disorientated with our noise and cannot fall asleep!"

In a sharp turnabout, Shan Rou slithered out of his grasp like a slippery fish. She demanded, "I am jumping mad and you are so thick-skinned to take advantage of me. Scram!"

Xiang Shaolong is gradually getting used to her unpredictable mood swings. Stretching in a yawn, he recalled his date with Talented Lady Ji. Passing her, he reached out his hand and patted her egg-liked face, "I'm scrambling. In fact, I am scrambling to the streets. Is Rou Rou contented?"

Displeased, Shan Rou enquired, "Where are you going?"

Grinning bitterly, Xiang Shaolong answered, "Do you think we are here on vacation? Do not forget your blood debt. To accomplish our goal, how can hubby not put in more effort?"

Stressed by her mission, Shan Rou kept quiet.

Like a dragonfly skimming the water surface, Xiang Shaolong bypassed her full lips and pecked her lightly on her cheek. Wishing her a good night, he slipped out.

Unexpected, Shan Rou kept on his tail tightly. Astonished, he stopped, "What are you following me?"

Shan Rou replied naturally, "I am your assistant and bodyguard. Logically, I have to escort you."

Xiang Shaolong was at his ends. How to bring her to rendezvous with Ji Yanran?

Turning around in the blink of an eye, he wanted grab her tender waist. Shan Rou's hand made a sudden wave and a sharp dagger is pointing straight at his throat. The fast turn of events gave Xiang Shaolong a big scare.

Proudly, she presents, "Skilled enough to be your assistant?"

Assuming that the dagger is nonexistent, he tried to seize her breasts.

Dismayed, she retreated and avoided his grasping palms, shouting, "How dare you!"

Xiang Shaolong gave a hiss. "I did what I did, what is the use of asking if I dared or not. You better comply and go back and sleep. If you disobey, I will divorce your immediately. A man will make good his word. Don't try my patience.'

Shan Rou stared at him ferociously. Evaluating his degree of seriousness, she eventually shrugged her shoulders in a cute manner and scolded, "Since you begged me to sleep, I will! What's the big deal anyway? And why do you keep mentioning about divorce!"

She turned around and returned to her room.

Xiang Shaolong can sense the thoughtful part of her character, making him feel love and sympathy at the same time. As she stepped over the door ledge, he shouted, "Rou Rou!"

Thinking that Xiang Shaolong had a change of heart and is willing to bring her along, she speedily turned her slim frame and cheered happily, "Yes?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at this wonder woman with deep passion. Opening his arms, he called, "Come! Let me hug you before you go back to sleep."

Shan Rou glanced at him with disappointment. Two red clouds formed around her cheeks. Shooting him another furious look, her small, straight mouth let out a cold grunt. She entered her room and slammed the door shut.

Thrilled, Xiang Shaolong gave a big laugh. He then left his home in the direction of Talented Lady Ji.

CHAPTER 10

Surmounting Problems

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN Xiang Shaolong arrived at Liu Residence, he felt extremely uneasy. It was because there is a huge increase in the number of guards and all the nearby houses have all been evacuated and converted into security posts.

Based on this fact, it is evident that Lord Longyang has the backing of Zhao. If not, there is no way he can relocate the neighbours.

The surrounding high points are all ambushed by reconnaissance troops and are very well-hidden. If Xiang

Shaolong is not an expert in this field plus his familiarity of the neighbourhood, he may just rush head in.

Lord Longyang is awfully obstinate. Swearing that Ji Yanran and Xiang Shaolong (not Dong Kuang) are keeping in touch, he has deployed more men and cast his net wide and big, hoping to catch Xiang Shaolong who is rumoured to be on his way back to Zhao.

However, he has to admit that Lord Longyang has laid his bets on the correct stake. The only hiccup is that Lu Buwei and himself has, through Lord Yangquan (Lu Buwei's Qin Court rival), tricked everyone who wishes to capture him. The fact that he has arrived much earlier makes it crucial to the success of his plan.

After a thorough examination of the environment, he has a seventy percent probability of success if he tries to enter her room undetected. Still, the risk is too high to undertake. When he was about to quit, he heard the whistling sound of an arrow. A strong arrow shot out from Ji Yanran's loft and fly through the backyard, burying itself into a soldier laying in ambush on the high tree outside the wall.

The receiver of this arrow fell from the tree and broke dozens of branches before he landed on the street with a loud "pong!" In terms of accuracy and arm strength, the shooter sends fear into one's heart.

The nearby ambushers were thrown into confusion and did not know how to deal with the enemy archer from the loft. Two more cries were heard on the other side of the room.

Two more men were shot and they slipped and fell head-down from different levels of the building onto the pavement.

Under the mesmerizing moonlight, Ji Yanran appeared on the balcony of her loft. Dressed in a full black spying suit and holding a strong bow, she hollered, "If there is anyone else who dare to peep at me Ji Yanran, I will kill without mercy."

The ambushing soldiers were frightened by her posture and her sure-kill arrows. Everyone withdrew, especially those hiding at the higher positions.

Xiang Shaolong was full of excitement. He could not imagine the usual gentle and scholarly Ji Yanran could be full of female prowess when provoked. Compared to Shan Rou, she do not lose even one bit. Without hesitation and while the enemy's monitoring network is in chaos, he used his agile climbing skills and swiftly vaulted over the high wall. Travelling within the shadows, he arrived at the bottom of Ji Yanran's loft and sent out his secret signal.

Ji Yanran was heard dismissing her maidservant.

Xiang Shaolong knew that the obstacle is gone and he started climbing to the second floor with his back facing the street. Ji Yanran is already waiting at the door with a big welcome.

This beauty leaped in for a full embrace. Both happy and annoyed, she chided, "You should not have come amongst all these danger. I can hold out for one night right?"

Laughing, Xiang Shaolong explained, "Beauty has commanded and regardless of danger and obstacles, it must be done. Moreover, one night's waiting is equivalent to three autumns. If Talented Lady cannot hold her desires and someone else took advantage of this, who can I find to settle the score?"

Ji Yanran is still dressed in her tight night outfit, revealing her full delicate curves, making Xiang Shaolong busy with his hands like a desperate lecher.

This beauty was violated until her desires can be seen from her eyes. She groaned, "I want to quit. I, Ji Yanran, would only yield to two men. It is either Dong Kuang or Xiang Shaolong. You are degrading me, humph!"

Both males and females are alike. Once their last line of defence has been broken, even virgins and gentlemen will pursue the need for sex. This is basic human nature and nothing to be surprised about.

Somersaulting in the blankets, both of them are entangled in the peak of passion. The thought of danger right outside the room only serves to increase the excitement of the rendezvous.

Until both of them are exhausted did all the heavy action started to slow down and stop.

Still wearing his mask, Xiang Shaolong laid horizontally on the bed while the naked Ji Yanran has transformed into a warm and lovely little lamb. She rested on his board chest with her silky hair spread over his face and neck.

Both of them do not want to spoil the peace and serenity of the loft and listened quietly to each others' subsiding breath.

The wind begins to blow harder outside the loft and the curtains rattled 'pi pah'.

The moon is gradually covered by dark clouds.

Charmingly, Ji Yanran complained, "You have harmed me and made me more and more wild. Yanran dare not look down on those loose and wanton women anymore."

Xiang Shaolong could hear the howling wind outside. Affectionate and tenderly stroking her delicate back, he summarized what has happened in the past few days, including that of Tian sisters, Shan Rou and Zhao Ya.

Hearing Shan Rou's masquerading as his wife; the carefree Ji Yanran could not resist about of jealousy. "That person should be Yanran! I also want to keep you company!"

She whined.

Reassuring her, Xiang Shaolong observed, "Tian Dan did not come with good intentions. He wants to stir up internal strife and weaken Zhao from within."

Forgetting her whining, Yanran climbed up from his chest and shared his pillow. Kissing him, she painted, "I have the same thinking too. Yan may even be instigated by him to attack Zhao in the first place. Qi shares its border with Zhao and Yan. If Tian Dan does not have any motives towards Zhao and Yan, even a kid will not believe it. Including the powerful Qin, no one is unafraid of Li Mu and Lian Po (Zhao's

best generals fighting Xiong Nu and Yan respectively). If Tian Dan can borrow Zhao Mu's hands and get rid of these two men, it would be his dream come true."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head, adding, "King Xiaocheng may be muddle-headed but he still has the basic wisdom that Lian and Li both generals are the pillars of Zhao and must not be shaken. But if Zhao Queen and Zhao Mu assassinates the Zhao King and takes over the state, this will be a different matter altogether."

Ji Yanran surmised, "Breaking all norms, Zhao Queen attended Zhao Mu's banquet tonight. This may be Zhao Mu's display of strength to Tian Dan, showing him that even the Queen has to listen to him."

Continuing in a smile, "Regarding Yanran's husband (Dong Kuang), it is also a point of contention between them. Fearing another Li Mu or Lian Po appearing, even the rare twin sisters have to be forced to change hands."

Xiang Shaolong is engrossed with her story. Patting her twice on the shoulder, he digged, "Are you jealous, my darling?"

Ji Yanran gave a serious reply, "Jealous to the max! Unless you come and accompany every other night, Oh! I am joking only. It is too dangerous."

Xiang Shaolong felt a sensation in his heart. He bemoaned, "I may find a solution to this problem. Hai! I have to go again. That Lord Longyang is coming over early in the morning. I'd rather face thousands of soldiers in battle than to face this

eyelid-batting and coquettish man no matter how womanly he is.”

Ji Yanran giggled, “In Daliang (Wei’s Capital), there are tonnes of gay men who wish they could swallow him in their stomach. Are you taking things for granted?”

Upset, Xiang Shaolong whimpered, “You are still making fun of me?”

Ji Yanran hurriedly gave him a sweet kiss and some passion as compensation.

After another bout of entanglement, they both got dressed. Ji Yanran set off to distract the enemy to cover his departure.

As the beauty was riding her horse out and looking for targets to vent her jealousy, he had long disappeared into thin air.

Back at home, Teng Yi had yet to retire and was drinking by himself.

Shaolong was amazed. Joining him for a couple of cups, he checked, “Does Second Brother have any difficulties?”

Sighing, Teng Yi explained, “When I saw Shan Rou, I thought of her sister. Before we left for Zhao, she got pregnant. How can I not be worried?”

Xiang Shaolong happily congratulated him. Then he apologised, “It is my fault to take you away from Sister in law and also from witnessing your child’s birth.”

Teng Yi chortled, "We are brothers and these words are unnecessary. Even if we cannot make it back to Xianyang, I will not be the least upset. However, our emotions do fluctuate and stuck in such a boring place with no task in sight, I tend to let my mind wander. Do you really think I can abandon all thoughts and meditate my Mozi everyday for a few hours?"

Xiang Shaolong can finally detect some humanity in this iron man. Pleased, he proposed, "There is a new task that needs your attention."

Teng Yi solicited, "What?"

Xiang Shaolong sniggered, "Disguise as me!"

Still surprised, Teng Yi called, "What?"

Comprehending, he asked, "Xiang Shaolong or Dong Kuang?"

Xiang Shaolong leisurely answered, "I will take responsibility for Dong Kuang. I only need Second Brother to use my flying needles to harm a few Zhao citizens. After that, leave a trail pretending that you are escaping to Wei. Once this is done, it will arouse everyone's suspicions."

Teng Yi nodded, "You can let the big sized Wu Guo wear my disguise and the plan will be flawless. But why are you escaping to Wei instead of Xianyang?"

Xiang Shaolong concludes, "This is my style, never returning until the mission is completed."

Teng Yi confidently spoke, "Who can understand you better than yourself? I will act as planned within the next ten days. In the wilderness, no one is my match."

After further discussion, it is past four in the morning. On his way back to his room, he remembered the Tian sisters. Excited, he yawned and visited their room.

Both girls were having sweet dreams and the bed is full of their scent. If he had not given his all on Ji Yanran, he would join them in bed. Now, all he can do is to give a longing sigh.

Suddenly, it began to rain heavily.

Xiang Shaolong frantically shut the windows and happened to hear Shan Rou closing the windows too.

Xiang Shaolong could not resist his adoration for this wilful girl. Reaching her door, he knocked lightly twice. No response.

Thinking how funny it is, he pushed open the door, entered and closed the door, latching it.

In the fine bed, Shan Rou was pretending to be asleep.

Thrilled with excitement, he slowly took off his clothes and weapons. Leaving only a pair of shorts, he lifted the blanket and was about to climb onto the bed. As expected, a gust of cold air blew into his face. Armed to the teeth, Shan Rou jumped up and pointed a dagger at his bare chest. Infuriated, she challenged, "Are you going to use force on me?"

Xiang Shaolong reached out his hand and twisted the tip of the dagger. Moving aside, he cheered, "Use force? Tonight is not appropriate. It will be dawn soon. Maybe tomorrow night! Now I only wish to hug my wife and have a short nap."

Shan Rou could only watch as he yanked her dagger away and put it aside. Following that, his exploring hands squeezed her against his near naked body but she could not put up any resistance.

Hugging her to sleep on the bed and covered with a blanket, he kissed her nice smelling face and enquired, "Do you always sleep armed like that?"

Drumming with anger, Shan Rou offered, "I trailed you secretly just now. You walk very fast and purposely find the hardest roof and tallest walls to climb. I was tired and lost track of you. If you promised to give me a set of scaling and climbing tools, Shan Rou will let you hug until the cows come home but you cannot take my virginity."

Xiang Shaolong jumped. Giving her cheek another peck, he rejected, "Whether you are agreeable or not, you must accompany me to sleep tonight."

Shan Rou roared, "I dare you to repeat what you just said!"

Xiang Shaolong gave up, "Fine! I surrender. You want the wind, I'll give you wind. You want the rain, it is raining outside. Come! Let me kiss your lips and we'll sleep. Want me to undress you so that it is more comfortable to sleep?"

Flustered, Shan Rou stated, "You dare! I sleep like this every night so that it is easier to run away!"

Xiang Shaolong was hit by a wave of realisation. Remembering that she was on the run for seven years, he felt fearful and gently coaxed, "Come and sleep in my arms. This is the safest and most enjoyable place in the whole world."

Shan Rou really yawned and closed her pretty eyes. Resting her face between his neck and shoulder, she begins to sleep deeply and made soft breathing sounds.

Filled with a strong urge to sleep, Xiang Shaolong lost consciousness and entered dreamland.

Not knowing how much time has passed, Xiang Shaolong suddenly woke up in a fluster.

The sky has yet to brighten. In his embrace, the weeping Shan Rou is shouting for her Mum and Dad. Xiang Shaolong kissed her tears away. In a moment, this beautiful girl begins to quieten down. Apparently, she is having a nightmare.

Xiang Shaolong is really dog-tired and resumed sleeping.

When he woke up again, he could hear the Tian sisters wishing Shan Rou good morning. He then noticed that the person in his embrace has gotten up long ago.

He overheard Shan Rou protesting softly, "Let the Lord Longyang have a good wait! Our master slept late last night and must let him rest a while more."

The Tian sisters would not dare to go her against her wishes and obediently complied.

Xiang Shaolong jumped off the bed. The sky is brightly lit. Walking to the door, he commented, "I have slept enough."

Three pairs of eyes turned to his direction. Witnessing his topless and muscular built, the three faces turned red at the same time.

The Tian sisters have seen quite a few naked men but it is Xiang Shaolong's body that made them lost their bearings. Making an excuse to retrieve the washing up tools, they make a quick exit.

Xiang Shaolong put one hand around Shan Rou's cute waist and invited, "Accompany me to the farm?"

Shaking her head, Shan Rou rejected, "Not today. I have something on."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "Where are you going? You are now my wife. If you leak out our identity, we shall perish together."

Shan Rou's round almond eyes stared at him. Angrily, she boasted, "Are you the only one who knows how to trick other people? Yesterday, I slipped out of the city and re-enter to look for you. Using the identity as your official wife, I was escorted in by the gate soldiers. Last night while you were out partying at the traitor's place, Teng Yi and I had a good talk about our plans. I guarantee I am not someone who will give you away with just a normal interrogation."

Xiang Shaolong could not defend himself from her attacks. Kissing her, he asked again, "You have yet to say where you are headed to."

Shyly, Shan Rou divulged, "Zhi Zhi is accompanying me to the tailor and make some dresses. Otherwise, how I can dress up to match your status?"

As Xiang Shaolong is thinking over her words, Shan Rou took the chance and slipped away. Before she entered the corridor, she turned around pretended to speak sternly, "Don't hug me every time we meet; I am not born for you to take advantage of!"

Disgruntled, Xiang Shaolong asked, "Want me to coax you to sleep tonight?"

"Let me think about it." Shan Rou answered cheekily and left laughing.

Thought comforted at her happy disposition, Xiang Shaolong could not help feeling some fear.

Carrying a bronze basin, the Tian sisters assisted him in washing up and changing.

Continuing his earlier train of thought, Xiang Shaolong thought deeper about his conversation with Tian Dan.

He is definitely too soft hearted and is not suitable to survive in this cold-blooded and unfeeling times. It is his soft-heartedness that all these girls come under his wing of care one by one. He has even released all his hatred for Zhao Ya and did not hold her betrayal to heart.

In these times, anyone with power will be surrounded with wives, concubines, courtesans and maids. At the end of the day, he is still someone from a different time zone and a different mindset. At the beginning, he is overjoyed and tireless with all his companions. Now that he has more and more beauties around him and does not want to compromise the quality of each relationship, he starts to feel the surmounting problems.

Not including the Tian sisters in his harem, he has Wu Tingfang, Zhao Qing and Ting Fangshi in Xianyang. Here, he has Ji Yanran, Zhao Zhi and Shan Rou. Despite having a lesser burden than Tang Bohu the Ming Dynasty playboy who has eight wives, he is still slightly overwhelmed. Making a silent vow, he will not get into any future love traps or he may die of exhaustion from his night activities.

Li Mu has warned him about sex and alcohol running one's health but he has forgotten this great advice on many occasions.

As his mind was wandering, Shan Rou's voice can be heard asking in the corridor, "Who are you?"

Wu Guo was heard answering, "Madam! This is Wei's Lord Longyang. He wanted to see if Master has woken up."

Lord Longyang's eerie voice sounded, "So it is Madam Dong who just came to Handan City."

Afraid that Shan Rou may say something wrong; Xiang Shaolong groped the breasts of the Tian sisters for a moment and scampered out.

Out of the blue, Shan Rou is acting like a gentle and mild-mannered wife, appropriately counteracting this gate-crasher Lord Longyang.

Giving a loud laugh, Xiang Shaolong put on a false front and paid his respects to the 'beautiful' Lord Longyang from afar. Lord Longyang was dressed in a snow white battle gown.

Lord Longyang's phoenix eyes brightened. He apologised, "I forgot that your wife has just arrived here plus you received a pair of beauties last night. I should have come later and not disturb your sweet dreams. Please forgive me."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly fascinated by his 'consideration'. To Shan Rou, he announced, "Hubby and Lordship are leaving the city. The earliest I will return would be in the evening."

Shan Rou submissively agreed.

Xiang Shaolong caught the look of sympathy Wu Guo had for him and escorted Lord Longyang to the front hall.

Lord Longyang smiled, "Your wife is so exquisite. No wonder you are not interested in any of the beauties in Handan City."

Xiang Shaolong does not know how to answer him. Giving two dry coughs, he avoided the question.

Stepping out of his residence, he can feel the warm sunshine all over the place. Even the wet floor from last night's rain was completely dried up,

Outside, there were nearly a hundred of Lord Longyang's personal bodyguards. Holding their horse, they waited patiently. Witnessing this display, Xiang Shaolong unconsciously shivered.

Lord Longyang's 'fragrant shoulder' leaned towards Xiang Shaolong. With a soft nudge, he explained tenderly, "Now that the roads are unsafe, it is better to have more swords protecting the excursion."

Smelling the flowery scent on Lord Longyang's clothes, Xiang Shaolong did not know whether it is good or bad.

Before he left for Zhao, he had not foreseen the dramatic turn of events. Not only does he have to deal with women, he must also deal with this man. To make it worse, he cannot offend him.

The complexity of Handan's situation is getting out of hand.

When can he successfully escape all this?

VOLUME 9

CHAPTER 1

Ambush On The Narrow Gorge

[Translated by SLYPHIAD]

XIANG SHAOLONG and Lord Longyang rode out together out of the city, protected front and back by high skilled bodyguards.

After receiving the news that Xiang Shaolong was about to arrive in Handan, the atmosphere in the city had been very tense, like a tightly drawn bowstring, forcing everyone not to be able to take a breather.

Even though everyone was itching for a fight, seemingly very confident, but everyone was afraid that they will be one of the unlucky ones.

From this it could be seen that he had built a god-like reputation, no one dared to underestimate him.

Lord Longyang brought his horse nearer to him and said, "Why haven't I seen Long Shan?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly commended Lord Longyang for being observant.

During this dangerous warring period, everyone was always vigilant. If it was any other influential officials, if they had someone as powerful as Teng Yi, they would want him close by to protect them twelve hours of the day. So when Xiang Shaolong went out without him close by was really something out of the ordinary.

He smiled, "This is my first time to a big city. So with all the excitement to go shopping, I wouldn't feel right without someone to accompany me."

Lord Longyang was only asking out of curiosity and not because of some suspicions, changing his topics, "Li Yuan sees Brother Dong as number one rival in love. He has misunderstood your intentions. It's truly outrageous."

Xiang Shaolong was confused, "My Lord, why do you say this?"

Lord Longyang smiled, "The person that Ji Yanran is in love with is Xiang Shaolong. Oh! Maybe, Yanran, herself, hasn't realised. The expression on her eyes when she's looking at Shaolong compared to when she's looking at others is totally different. Maybe at that time, she hadn't realised yet that she had fallen in love with Xiang Shaolong, but I had known for sure."

Xiang Shaolong's heart trembled in fear. This Lord Longyang is definitely someone with sharp observation skill. If he's not careful, he might accidentally reveal his identity from the slight tip of his eyebrow. He must be constantly alert around him.

Lord Longyang grunted, "I don't believe that Ji Yanran and Xiang Shaolong didn't already have a secret agreement. As long as we observed Ji Yanran closely, we can surely lure Xiang Shaolong out."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "Didn't you also want to take care of Learned Lady Ji?"

Lord Longyang sighed, "I have always viewed her as an irreplaceable friend. She fell in love with Xiang Shaolong is a natural thing. Mister Dong hasn't yet seen Xiang Shaolong, he is someone with out of this world talents. Regardless of his style of conversation, insight, heart or spirit, they are all distinctive amongst us. I, myself, would like to be his friend, if we weren't already standing on the opposite grounds as

enemies. But now, I have to find any way to assassinate him regardless of how unscrupulous it might be.”

Xiang Shaolong intentionally probed him out, “Even though I know that I don’t have an ounce of hope of attaining Learned Lady Ji, but I felt that she has high regard of me. Hey! According to your observation, how does it compare when she looks at me compared to looking at Xiang Shaolong?”

Lord Longyang nodded, “She truly regards you highly. That’s for sure. The problem is she is a once and one type of person, unlike that promiscuous Lady Ya. Xiang Shaolong had the advantage of entering her heart first, you and Li Yuan would be better off to forget about her.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed, “The situation doesn’t seem hopeless yet. We have someone as powerful as you here, My Lord, to take care of Xiang Shaolong. We can already count down the days that he stayed alive. At that time, wouldn’t Learned Lady Ji need to start searching for another person?”

Lord Longyang smiled bitterly, “The fact has proven that everyone who underestimates Xiang Shaolong will end up on the losing ground. No matter how the Zhaos tried to arrange everything, I still believe that Xiang Shaolong would have ingenious plan to sneak into Handan. With the craftiness of both Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong, how could they have leaked their whereabouts to the other hostile party in Qin, there must be some trap in there.”

Xiang Shaolong trembled in fear.

He started to realise that this Lord Longyang isn't a simple person. No wonder he could become Lord Xinling's formidable adversary.

Amongst all of the countries' influential politicians here in Handan, beside the heavyweight class Tian Dan, Lord Longyang also needed to be counted in.

But his weakness is, Hey! It seems like he has fallen in love with himself, so he has confided in himself, hoping to win Xiang Shaolong's good favour. Oh my God! This is such a complete mess. Such complicated situation!

At that time, they had left the Handan city far away, riding along the government road towards the Hidden Army Valley, surrounded from both sides with tall mountains in the open countries in the autumn weather, with withered and fallen leaves.

Lord Longyang's underlings were all seemingly like they have reached the countryside relaxing and stretching their muscles. Lord Longyang saw Xiang Shaolong was quiet without a word, knew that he was pondering his words previously, joyfully continued, "Xiang Shaolong has three important enemies, King Xiaocheng, Zhao Mu and Guo Zhong. As long as Xiang Shaolong is alive, I am afraid that these three people wouldn't be able to sleep peacefully."

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly filled with uneasy feelings. This was called a soldier's alertness. It didn't need a factual proof for a reason.

This time, they were about to enter one of the small narrow gorge towards the Hidden Army Valley. Both sides were surrounded with dense thick forest. If there was an ambush, this would be the idealist place for it.

Xiang Shaolong swiftly stopped his horse.

Lord Longyang continued for another ten or more steps before noticing it and looked back, filled with confusion, "Is there a problem, Mister?"

When the rest noticed that Lord Longyang had stopped his horse, they all followed his lead.

Xiang Shaolong continued gazing towards the entrance of the narrow gorge, frowned, "Have you and Xiang Shaolong ever celebrate a festival before?"

Lord Longyang was slightly surprised, turned his horse's head to follow his gaze towards the narrow gorge, ordered his underlings, "Go open the road for me!"

More than ten riders rode out from amongst the crowd towards the narrow gorge.

Those persons' shields were all hanging on the side of their horses. Apparently, they didn't believe that there would be someone waiting to ambush them.

Xiang Shaolong was also extremely puzzled, who would want to take care of Lord Longyang? Could it that he's being overly cautious, raising a false alarm?

Lord Longyang relaxed a little as he saw his underlings entered the gorge, smiled, "If Xiang Shaolong came to take care of me, then there must be some kind of misunderstanding. Otherwise, how would he know that I will go to the Hidden Army Valley today?"

Xiang Shaolong's uneasiness was growing by the minute.

After exercising the meditation method according to the Mohist Addendum, his sixth sense had become sharper. It had repeatedly saved him from dangerous situations, otherwise he might still be nursing his grievances back in Xianyang.

Even though the autumn sun was still hanging low in the sky, but he could feel the chill in the air.

Lord Longyang shouted, "Have you clearly thought about what I told you before, Mister Dong?"

Xiang Shaolong felt a headache coming, changed a topic, "How come your underlings haven't come back yet?"

Even before the words finished spoken, crying sounds could be heard. One of his famous swordsman underling appeared from the gorge, waved from far away indicating that everything's alright.

Xiang Shaolong was embarrassed for being overly suspicious.

On the contrary, Lord Longyang consoled him, "It's never wrong to be more careful! I admired Mister Dong alertness!"

Everyone continued riding towards the gorge.

Lord Longyang spoke in his soft and sweet tone, "Mister, have you ever ponder over our current war and what you would do to establish a long-lasting career for yourself?"

Xiang Shaolong was amazed at his craftiness. This person definitely has a sharp intelligence, something that most people have long been lacking in this period. He had seen that he's not the type of person who'd be happy raising horses his whole life. That's why he uttered these words.

When they were about 100 steps from the entrance, Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt alarmed again. But he could only indistinctly catch a blurry shadow and nothing concrete.

He casually replied, "Besides rearing horses, I know nothing about the art of war. Just based on fierceness, how could I lead the three armies through the desert?"

Lord Longyang smiled, "Mister doesn't have to be modest. Just from looking at how you've been trained and that you have no fear of death, I know that you have the talent to be a famous general, otherwise, Tian Dan would have ignored you."

Now, they were about 50 more steps from the entrance, the front guards had started to enter the gorge.

An idea suddenly flashed through Xiang Shaolong's mind. He whipped his horse and shouted, "Quick! Turn around!"

Now he realised the reason for his uneasiness.

Lord Longyang's underling that passed the safe signal before quickly returned the gorge after signalling. It just didn't

make sense. Inside the gorge, there were ten more Lord Longyang's personal bodyguards. As a reconnaissance team, they should have guard the entrance and exit of the gorge, along with all of the strategic points inside the gorge until Lord Longyang passed through before withdrawing their position. Otherwise, if the enemies ambush from the entrance and the exit, wouldn't they be surrounded and died inside?

Xiang Shaolong also wasn't basing this from the carelessness of Lord Longyang's underling alone but because he had been on guard the whole time. He finally realised that if his enemy was planning on ambushing them there, they wouldn't have placed anyone in the dangerous zone. That's why he quickly rushed back in.

This time, Lord Longyang and his four personal bodyguards all frowned at him. They all felt that he's being too extremely cautious.

The front guards ignored his warning and kept on riding into the entrance.

Lord Longyang forcefully reined in his horse to be polite. As he was about to speak, a tragic scream could be heard faintly coming from the gorge.

Everyone's face paled. Suddenly, a stream of enemies flow out from inside the gorge, each one of them was holding a crossbow and arrows, and stringing them on. The front group of ten or more soldiers jumped off their horse and prepared a frontline defence.

At the same time, killing shouts could be from all four corners.

From both sides of the dense forest, the enemies flowed out. In an instant, enemies could be seen everywhere.

All of these people dressed as common people. As far as the eyes could see, there must be at least several hundred people. Lord Longyang's personal guards, even though they were elite soldiers who have experienced hundred battles, but there were many enemies compared to them. Crossbows were also hard to guard against. Without any time to prepare, they've been ambushed and were now in complete disarray.

Xiang Shaolong ducked down and avoided two arrows but from underneath, he could hear a pitiful neigh and the horse reared up.

He didn't even get a chance to see where his horse had been shot, both feet fiercely kicked off, forcing him to lean sideways and fell off the saddle. He leaped across towards Lord Longyang, held on his waist and leaped off the horse. Both fell on the bushes on the side of the road. Lord Longyang's saddle had long fallen off the horse, it was filled with arrows.

Lord Longyang was the enemy's main goal.

His number one underlings, Jiao Xu, and other unhurt underlings all jumped off their horse and rushed in to protect Lord Longyang.

Lord Longyang was about to join in the fight when Xiang Shaolong dragged him back to the forest. Surrounded on all four sides with battles, all around killing sounds can be heard. The enemies had finished their first batch of arrows and hurrying to reload their arrows. This was exactly the perfect time to escape.

Wind of swords swished through.

Xiang Shaolong's back was leaning against the grass. He moved his two feet, continuously pressuring the enemies back.

Those two people screamed in agony. While trying to scramble away, they rushed into three other attacking enemies.

“Clang!”

Xiang Shaolong pulled out his long sword out of the sheath, followed with two people spilled their blood.

When he leaped up, Lord Longyang shook out of his reverie, pulled out his sword and sprung forward.

“Swish!”

His sword flew like a water dragon, slaying two rushing enemies instantly.

Jiao Xu and the other ten more guards fought and retreated at the same time towards the forest while protecting them both.

Xiang Shaolong knew that they were in danger just from looking that they were surrounded on all sides by the enemies. He quickly determined the best way to break out of the enemy's barricade, shouted, "Follow me!"

He waved around Blood Wave, leaving behind layers of the sword's shadows, leading the way out of the barricade and deep into the forest.

His swordsman skill was superb. His strength surprised others. Moreover, inside the forest, the enemies were unable to take advantage of their numbers to crush them. They were truly swept over by the wind.

"Dang!"

One of the enemy was chopped off by him to the point of scaring away all of the onrushing enemies.

But this scene would only last for a second before the reinforcement arrived and countless enemies rushed forward again.

Xiang Shaolong entered the Mohist's defensive mind, calmly leading Lord Longyang and the others deeply into the forest, even killing seven eight enemies on the way.

Xiang Shaolong took advantage of this time to observe Lord Longyang and the others.

At this time, besides Jiao Xu, there were only seven people left following them. Everyone of them was badly injured. The situation was extremely dangerous.

But the enemies kept coming like tidal wave.

Even though Lord Longyang forged ahead courageously, but he was covered in blood. Not sure though whether it's his blood or the enemies' blood splashed onto him.

His right back shoulder was blotched bright red.

Xiang Shaolong wildly shouted, swung his sword backhand and penetrated the abdomen of the raid soldier, followed with a flick of his wrist to fend off an attack from the left side. While the opponent dodged his attack, in that instant of gap, he continuously attacked, wildly stabbed, and hardly penetrated the enemy's chest.

When the enemies saw how brutal he can be, they all retreated, allowing him to enter by several meters.

"Peng!"

Lord Longyang staggered and bumped into his back. It seemed like he'd been injured again by the enemy's poisonous hand.

Xiang Shaolong shouted loudly, "Don't worry about me!"

He waved his sword, killing another attacker.

"Argh!"

One of the guard injured badly and toppled over, the situation had just become more critical.

Xiang Shaolong's Blood Wave sword was like a lightning. Within a move, an enemy instantly met with a violent death.

He fiercely pulled Lord Longyang, at the same time, he called out to Jiao Xu and the rest, "Follow me!"

Forcing his way into the left side of the enemy's net, he repeatedly waved his Blood Wave, forcing the enemy to retreat one by one.

During this time when they were bathed in blood like the war, Xiang Shaolong displayed his boldness, strong stamina and his years of strict training as an elite soldier. He was like a never tiring machine, moving freely amongst the enemy formation.

Amongst all this, he still didn't forget to examine all four surroundings. He saw on the left hand side, not far away, there was a slope road. That's why he called Lord Longyang and the others to follow him to break through the formation.

One move of attacking to defend executed quickly and violently.

"Argh!"

The enemy's sword was split in half. While he was shocked, Xiang Shaolong moved sideways and kicked him, causing him to spew out blood repeatedly and fell on the big tree behind him.

Xiang Shaolong dodged right and left, swung backward and stabbed the left chest of the enemy that tried to surprise attack him from behind. While at the same time, he moved

and tackled the enemy till he tumbled down and met the earth.

Up till now, he had succeeded in breaking out and killing all the way to the edge of the slope. The pressure had been reduced. Gazing downward, he saw a strong flowing river.

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed. He turned back, pulled out his sword swiftly and broke into the formation surrounding Lord Longyang, Jiao Xu and the rest. Amongst them, one was at the end of his life.

Xiang Shaolong used his sword to forcefully sweep away his enemies, shouted, "Jump down! That's the only way to escape with your life."

He turned around and pounced on Lord Longyang, grabbing his waist and rolling down the slope, not knowing how many branches and leaves they've broken and smashed along the way.

Jiao Xu and the other five bodyguards dared not hesitate. All followed his way and rolled down the hills.

"Splash..., splash...."

All eight people fell into the river successively, instantly dying the river blood red.

Xiang Shaolong grabbed hold of Lord Longyang and swam away following the river's currents. Before long, they had left the place far away.

The enemy pursued by following along the river.

Up the front, the water noise grew louder like an exploding volcano.

Before anyone realised what's happening, the currents were moving faster and faster. Unexpectedly they had reached the edge of around seven metres high waterfall. They immediately fell onto the pool below following the waterfall.

When everyone was still recovering from the high fall, the current brought them away again. The enemies' shout was growing quieter as the distance grew.

When Xiang Shaolong, Lord Longyang and the rest met the Zhaos convoys, it was already midnight.

Even though the injuries had been properly bind up, but because everyone had lost a lot of blood and was tired, they all looked pale and exhausted. Two amongst them even had a fever which required immediate attention.

Zhao Mu, Le Cheng and the rest had already received the news and were waiting anxiously on the gate.

Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang had always had a private agreement between each other, while Xiang Shaolong was his hope of ascending the throne. His heart was burning with worry. On the other hand, if Le Cheng, acting as Handan's guardian's general, allowed anything to happen to this important Wei's official, Lord Longyang, it would be hard for him not to get blamed for it. So, both of them were equally anxious and worried.

Both Zhao Mu and Le Cheng scrambled forward towards Xiang Shaolong and Lord Longyang's horse cart. When they saw both of their appearance, even though a little bit shocking, but since there wasn't any fatal injury, they were both able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Lord Longyang was secretly watching Xiang Shaolong affectionately, strenuously uttered, "If it wasn't for Mister Dong risking his life to save mine, I wouldn't have any left to meet you two anymore."

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly.

It could be said that Lord Longyang is his number one mortal enemy, but at that time, there was no time to think about this problem, even if he had this idea, he wouldn't be able to not rescue him when he saw it. This was so like what Tian Dan had analysed. Softhearted is truly his biggest weakness.

Le Cheng heavily said, "Did you see Xiang Shaolong?"

Xiang Shaolong and Lord Longyang were both astounded.

The latter frowned, "It doesn't seem like it was Xiang Shaolong. But during those chaotic situation, we only cared about escaping, using the river to escape, and didn't have the time to see clearly who the enemy might be."

Le Cheng replied, "I've already sent out soldiers to seal off all roads and scout the area. Hopefully, we will receive the good news soon to report to my Lord."

Lord Longyang and Xiang Shaolong knew that he didn't have any confidence of this just from listening to his tone.

The raiding party surprisingly was able to slip within 15kms of the area surroundings Handan in great secrecy. It wouldn't surprise them if they had already prepared an escape route.

But who would want to get rid of Lord Longyang? Xiang Shaolong of course knew that it wasn't he himself who was responsible.

Lord Longyang wasn't sure whether the reason why he wasn't interested in speaking up was due to the injuries he had sustained.

Both Zhao Mu and Le Cheng personally escort Lord Longyang and Xiang Shaolong separately returning to their residence.

Shan Rou and the Tian sisters had long heard of the news and were both waiting in front of the gate to welcome him home.

Le Cheng then took leave.

Shan Rou complained, "If I knew, I would have come with you!"

Wu Guo was confused, "Who did it?"

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng supported him inside towards the inner chamber. Both sisters had long been crying till their eyes were red and swollen.

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "Let me rest a little bit before I will explain everything clearly to you, alright?"

Suddenly, he remembered the circumstance of which Lord Longyang's underling lured them into entering the gorge.

He trembled when he realised who probably would like to assassinate Lord Longyang.

No wonder he's got that long face.

CHAPTER 2

Faking Injury

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHILE the Tian sisters and Shan Rou were frantically dressing the wounds on Xiang Shaolong, he had a brainwave. To Wu Guo he inquired, "If there any where to make me look even worse? I want to give others the impression that I am so badly injured that I cannot even get up! "

Scratching his head for a while, the impatient Shan Rou cut in, "Let me disguise you like a corpse and scare the hell out of everyone who sees you."

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng could not hold their giggles.

Xiang Shaolong explored, "That is not enough. It is best to make me bleed non-stop or even a high fever all over my body."

Tian Feng chuckled, "Leave this to us sisters. Just hide heat pads under the blanket."

Shan Rou and Wu Guo looked at each other before they both turned to him. They cannot comprehend what tricks is he up to?

Xiang Shaolong commanded Wu Guo, "At dawn, send someone out of the city and invite Big Brother and Little Jun back with half of our forces. At the same time, bring someone to see me immediately. "

He then taught him how to liaise with Pu Bu.

Knowing that Xiang Shaolong is going into action, Wu Guo left happily.

The Tian sisters started working on the heat pad.

Shan Rou sat by the bed and personally applied a layer of white powder on his mask. Frowning, she whined, "Aren't you going to tell me what you are up to?"

Instead, Xiang Shaolong's mind is on another subject. Shaking his head, he protested, "This is sucks. If someone touches my face, their hands will be stained by the powder and everyone will know that I am faking my injuries. "

Paying no heed to his words, Shan Rou left the room and came back shortly with a full haversack. In a cold and

negative manner, she demanded, "This is not my problem. Quickly tell me your plans. Otherwise, I will not display my best skill and help you to fake your injuries."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "Work on the injuries first. If delayed and I have visitors, the scheme will fall apart."

Pouting, Shan Rou held her obvious anger and produced several bottles of different sizes from her haversack. She poured liquids from them and started to mix them in a separate basin.

Xiang Shaolong reached out his hand and caressed her elastic and smooth legs. Shan Rou exclaimed, "I want to kill a man! But I cannot disclose who he is yet!"

Shan Rou's slender body trembled slightly and gazed towards him.

The sky has yet to brighten when King Xiaocheng descended upon his residence with his entourage. Seeing his corpse-like look and with a temperature running, King Xiaocheng was terrified. He cried, "Subject Dong! They had said your injuries are not serious. This won't do! I must summon the Imperial Physician to attend to you."

Now, it is Xiang Shaolong's turn to be shocked. In a hoarse voice, he frantically replied, "I am deeply grateful for Your Majesty's benevolence. I caught a bad chill when I fell into the river and lost a lot of blood to end up in this state. I will need only a few days rest to get back to my feet. Moreover, I have subordinates who are well-versed in medicine and I am

used to their prescriptions. If we change the medication, I am afraid of side effects. Ai!”

He pretended to cry out and even showed his blood-stained blanket and his open wound on the shoulder.

King Xiaocheng was amazed that he was more severely injured than Lord Longyang. Thinking for a while, his eyes turned ferocious and interrogated, “Did you catch a glimpse of Xiang Shaolong?”

Swerving around and patting his head, he added, “I was not thinking clearly and have forgotten that you have never seen this traitor.”

Xiang Shaolong was tickled.

After a moment a silence, he praised, “On this fateful trip, it is all thanks to Subject Dong protection of Lord Longyang or he will surely lose his life. If he died, how am I to account for it to King Anli? And the hope of an alliance treaty will also go up in smoke.”

Xiang Shaolong could only smile sourly.

He originally came to Handan to kill but under the unique circumstances, he saved the lives of Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang. Right now, even he does not believe that he is Xiang Shaolong, much less others.

He purposely investigates, “Your Majesty has probably visited Lord Longyang; did he say that he saw Xiang Shaolong?”

King Xiaocheng shook his head and replied, "Lord Longyang is almost as badly injured as you. His spirits are very low and he refuses to say anything. But except for Xiang Shaolong, no one is that powerful. And only he can access information in Handan from spies. Now that he is the bastard of Qin, he would naturally fight against the five other states."

Sensing his tone, Xiang Shaolong recognized that King Xiaocheng does not consider the State of Yan to be an ally or an equal. He deduced that Zhao King has not succumbed to the pressures of Li Yuan and Tian Dan.

King Xiaocheng can see that Xiang Shaolong has difficulties opening his eyes. Patting his feverish shoulder, he promised, "Subject Dong please rest well. I will send some rare medicine for external injuries."

Standing up, he continued, "Your abilities are not limited to horse-breeding. I will give you more responsibilities in the future."

After King Xiaocheng left, Xiang Shaolong could not hold back his exhaustion and truly fell into deep slumber. In his sleep, he can sense human activity and visitors to his bedside. Wu Guo is always present and naturally described his injuries in detail and exaggerating some facts. Actually, he needs not say anything. The heavy smell of medication and the 'bleeding' open wound is sufficient to paint a bleak picture.

At the appointed time, Pu Bu arrived.

Xiang Shaolong was in high spirits and they had a good talk. The attendant reported that Zhao Ya is here to visit him and Pu Bu hurriedly left from the back door.

Zhao Ya moved to his bedside and put her hand on his steaming forehead. Startled, she withdrew her hand and exclaimed, "You are sick!"

Opening his eyes by half, Xiang Shaolong replied, "It's ok! I will be fine after two days of sleep!"

Scrutinising his complexion, she sighed, "Luckily, there is still energy in your eyes. Otherwise, it would be disastrous."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken, knowing that Zhao Ya had seen the only loophole. Fortunately, she had yet to raise any suspicions. He was puzzled at her calmness over the 'Xiang Shaolong reappearance', and tested, "Seems like Xiang Shaolong came to Handan earlier; or else your old man (himself) would have caught him."

Zhao Ya cocked her head and softly analyzed, "The assassination of Lord Longyang can be masterminded by Tian Dan, Li Yuan, Zhao Mu or even Prince Xinling but it will never be Xiang Shaolong. I know him too well. Unless it is his sworn enemy, he will never kill. Lord Longyang did not have any enmity with him and he will not raise the alarm with such a meaningless act."

Xiang Shaolong is astonished at Zhao Ya's attention to such minute details. Feelings started to swell up again in him. Knowing that he is a good man, why did she still conspire with King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu to harm him?

Xiang Shaolong has suspected it was Prince Xinling's assassination plot but after Zhao Ya's explanation, he started to waver on his earlier conclusions.

Zhao Mu is definitely out of the picture. Li Yuan and Tian Dan are the main suspects as they have a strong motive. The power struggle in Wei is the Wei King and Lord Longyang versus Prince Xinling. In addition, Lord Longyang is the heir to Anli (Wei King). If anything befalls him, Anli will lay the blame on Prince Xinling and fight him to death.

When Wei descends into chaos, the main beneficiaries are Qi and Chu who are opposed to the three-state ally.

Now that Qin is disunited and are not preparing any offensive campaigns, this is the best time for the rest of the states to display their strengths.

Remembering the Lu Gong secret manual, he derided, "Xiang Shaolong may be working with Prince Xinling to deal with Lord Longyang."

Zhao Ya factually countered, "Prince Xinling could not wait to tear Xiang Shaolong apart and drink his fresh blood. Xiang Shaolong is also someone who will not bow to his command. How can there be such a possibility?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be surprised and asked, "What event has caused this enmity?"

Craftily, Zhao Ya whispered, "This is a secret. Mister has yet to fulfil his obligation. Once you succeed, I will tell you everything I know."

Xiang Shaolong was hopping mad but was touched by her appreciation. He closed his eye and sighed, "I am getting tired. Thank you Princess for your care and concern."

Zhao Ya did not want to leave after such a short visit. She stood up reluctantly but leaned forward towards Xiang Shaolong. She lowered her petite head and kissed him fully on his lips, her tongue snaking out.

Xiang Shaolong is afraid she may detect his scent. He changed his style and attacked her flexible tongue roughly. He used a lot of force and grabbed her breasts wildly.

Unexpectedly, Zhao Ya did not mind his uncouth manners and lie down and begin tussling with him lustfully.

As things are getting out of hand, Zhao Ya aggressively retreated. Red-faced, she shrieked, "No! You cannot lose control now."

Giving him a look, promised, "Once you are well, I will let you do whatever you want to me!"

Old feelings swelled up in Xiang Shaolong, making him horni. Sighing lightly, he apologised, "Please forgive subject for being unable to send Princess out."

Curling her eyelashes in a smile, she sashayed off. Just as she stepped out, Ji Yanran's entourage arrived. Seeing his devastated condition, hot tears poured out from her eyes. When the truth is revealed, her sadness turned into glee.

Sitting on his bed hugging his sweet-smelling belle, he enquired, "Have you seen Lord Longyang?"

Ji Yanran happily commented, "You are really farsighted. Nothing can escape your eyes. Hai! Though I am your wife, I am the last to know about your injuries. I was terribly anxious but still have to force myself to visit that cross-dressing fellow first to avoid suspicion. There is more to come. When I come to visit my husband, I have to be interrogated by that wild bitch who is masquerading as your wife. My hubby! You must decide for me and give me the justice I deserved."

Xiang Shaolong could feel his headache expanding. He slipped both his hands into the clothes and started to fondle, hoping to distract her. Changing the topic, he disclosed, "Before the attack, Lord Longyang confided in me. He told me to give up on you for the person Talented Lady Ji has fallen for is not Dong Kuang, nor Li Yuan, but the number one enemy of the six states Xiang Shaolong."

Under his daring fondling, Ji Yanran moaned, "Number one enemy of the Six States, Shaolong's words are indeed fresh and creative. Oh! No wonder Lord Longyang is focusing all his attention on me. Ai! Shaolong! Are you trying to kill me? Ah! If this goes on, I am going to want you right now."

Xiang Shaolong frightfully withdrew his hands; he has to be 'ready' for potential visitors.

Ji Yanran lied on his body with her face red like embers. She groaned, "Has Shaolong concluded who is the mastermind behind the assassination?"

Xiang Shaolong stroked her fair back and replied, "I wish to seek the wisdom of Talented Lady."

Biting his ear in return, she answered, "The biggest suspect would be Prince Xinling. He will definitely send people to retrieve the Lu Gong Secret Manual stolen by you. As a matter of fact, everyone here would love to lay their hands on the manual."

Stressed, Xiang Shaolong suggested, "If the manual is with Guo Zhong, then Li Yuan would have proposed marriage to Guo Xiu'er."

Straightening her beautiful posture, Ji Yanran proudly proclaimed, "If I make Li Yuan give up hope, he will marry her straight away"

It finally dawned on Xiang Shaolong. For a top quality beauty like Guo Xiu'er, there would be no lack of suitors. The only issue is the status in society.

Guo Zhong will never let his daughter marry down and even much less of becoming a concubine.

Ji Yanran holds a more prestigious status than Guo Xiu'er. If Li Yuan won her heart, she would be his official wife. If Li Yuan sealed his marriage with Guo Xiu'er, Ji Yanran will never marry him. This is precisely his present dilemma.

Recalling earlier events, she suspiciously judged, "I think hubby is better than Lu Gong. Even Lu Ban may not be able to design the first class climbing tools you possess."

Xiang Shaolong felt guilty and shared a passionate kiss with Ji Yanran. Using an excuse to visit the injured Xiang Shaolong, Wu Zhuo arrived with a huge force.

After Ji Yanran left in the most reluctant manner, Wu Zhuo, Jing Jun, Wu Guo and Shan Rou gathered in a secret room for a discussion. Zhao Zhi also came early and entered the room with the rest.

After they are settled in their seats, Xiang Shaolong jested, "If Le Cheng lost his head to a band of masked fighters tonight, who will people speculate the killers to be?"

Everyone shook with excitement and stared at him with bewilderment.

His actions are beyond comprehension.

Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi cried, "Ah!"

Zhao Zhi reached out and grabbed Shan Rou's hands tightly, her eyes reddened with emotion.

Jing Jun was puzzled, "Does two sister-in-laws have an enmity with Le Cheng?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. Le Cheng is Zhao Mu's right hand man. How can he not play a part in Zhao Mu's devious schemes?

Zhao Zhi heard this kid addressing him as sister-in-law sincerely and was pleased. She took a quick glance at him before lowering her embarrassed face.

Shan Rou put on a satisfied look with her 'sister in law' title. Her eyes flashed and recalled, "The person who came to arrest my family is indeed Le Cheng, he even... Ai!"

She sadly lowered her head and announced, "I wish to stop bringing up the past!"

Suddenly, she raised her head. Gritting her teeth, she swore, "I must cut down his head personally."

Wu Zhuo seriously questioned, "Does third brother really has confidence? Le Cheng is a crafty and cowardly character. He is heavily protected by able fighters at all times. Now that the city is in a state of alert, it will make the task much harder."

Full of confidence, Xiang Shaolong said, "If you can do what others cannot, life is more interesting. Assassination is based on strategy, not numbers. If we can accurately understand his movement, we can devise a brilliant operation that will enable us to make a silent attack and retreat."

Wu Zhuo is still hesitant and added, "Would this raise the alarm and reveal out whereabouts in Handan City?"

"Coward!" Shan Rou despising scolded.

Wu Zhuo's face darkened. He is a proud warrior and cannot tolerate such words at him, moreover the person who said it was a female. Zhao Zhi was horrified and tugged at Shan Rou's shoulders with blame.

Upset, Xiang Shaolong roared, "I respect Big Brother Wu the most! You crossed your line of authority, apologise now!"

Shan Rou knew she was too much but she gave a meek laugh and corrected, "I am not talking about Big Brother Wu. I saw Little Jun trembling and scolded him for being a coward, causing the misunderstanding."

Jing Jun eyes widened and was about to protest that he was wronged. Catching Zhao Zhi's wink, he could only keep quiet and took the blame for Shan Rou.

How can Wu Zhuo hold it against her? For Shan Rou case, this is as good as an apology. Shaking his head, he could only clarify, "I am never one to shy from danger. I only wish to emphasize on the important issues and make sure that we do not be penny wise and pound foolish."

Jing Jun place a lot of importance in family relations. He helped to speak up for Shan Rou, "I am truly the coward. Big Brother Wu is courageous and majestic. He is fearless in the most fearful situation."

Everyone is amused by his exaggeration and the atmosphere lightened up.

Xiang Shaolong analyzed, "Le Cheng is a dangerous man. If he acts, we can be annihilated. The big question is where his loyalty lies. Is he still loyal to Zhao Mu or has he been bought over by King Xiaocheng? Most likely he is only true to himself. Like the grass on the wall, it will bend towards whichever strong wind that it blowing."

While waiting for them to digest his words, he continued, "If Zhao Mu wants to rebel tomorrow, he will expose our relationship with him to Le Cheng to increase his confidence.

This will make it easier to deploy his men but it will be very dangerous at the same time. Do you understand my meaning?"

Shan Rou, Zhao Zhi, Wu Guo and Jing Jun frowned deeply, not being able to catch the underlying meaning. Only Wu Zhuo let out a lasting sigh and agreed, "Yes! I understand why Le Cheng has to be killed first. If he happens to be King Xiaocheng's spy in Zhao Mu camp, he will pass on the secret to King Xiaocheng and we will die without even knowing why."

Shan Rou was hit with realization.

Xiang Shaolong smilingly added, "Killing Le Cheng brings us another benefit."

Even Wu Zhuo cannot see where the benefit lays.

Xiang Shaolong explained plainly, "We will make the assassination as ambiguous as possible. We will create a scenario whereby it seems to be done by Xiang Shaolong but after careful thinking, it may not be done by him. Based on Le Cheng's wavering allegiance, this will stir up suspicions between Zhao Mu and King Xiaocheng. Both will suspect each other of killing Le Cheng in Xiang Shaolong's name. What will be the end result?"

Everyone was blown away by the brilliance in this plan and admired his throughout analysis.

Jing Jun deduced, "Both men are suspicious by nature. They will start arming themselves for a head on confrontation."

Nodding, Wu Zhuo visualised, "It would be best if King Xiaocheng summoned Lian Po or Li Mu back for his protection and assistance. This will provoke Zhao Mu into immediate rebellion. We can then take this opportunity to fish Zhao Mu this big fish in troubled waters."

Shan Rou frowned, "Then the biggest challenge is how to cut off Le Cheng's head?"

Xiang Shaolong was ticked and was about to answer when an attendant reported that Tian Dan is here to visit him.

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed.

Within Handan City, the man whom he has the most misgivings is Tian Dan.

CHAPTER 3

Opportunity To Kill At Night

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

TIAN DAN entered his bedroom and on his left and right is his bodyguard Liu Zhongxia and Liu Zhongshi brothers. He walked straight to the bedside and intimately asked, “How is Brother Dong doing?”

Tian Dan has a natural dominating spirit and Xiang Shaolong raised his awareness and monitored his words carefully. Nodding to his as a gesture of acknowledgement, he replied, “I am up to my neck in work and is also enjoying the pleasures of wine and women. After a little soak in the river,

I caught this resulting fever. Ai! Chancellor Tian, please have a seat!”

Tian Dan smiled and corrected, “I love to talk while standing. Hei! Brother Dong’s eyes are full of energy, how can you be immersed in women? You must have over exert physically and purposely caught a chill!”

Xiang Shaolong knew he cannot pretend in front of this man. He grumbled, “I guess so!”

Scrutinizing him for a while, Tian Dan simply asked, “Are Brother Dong’s followers all personally trained by you?”

From his words, Xiang Shaolong deduced that when he was trying to force his way at the city gates with King Xiaocheng dissuading him, Tian Dan must have been present and observed the entire situation. He was alarmed that Tian Dan is now suspicious of him. He pretend to be unaffected and answered, “To raise horses, you must first prevent your horses from being stolen. The south is full of barbarians so I trained them every day to prepare for this threat.”

After a moment’s thought, Tian Dan nodded, “If Brother Dong can train my Qi soldiers to be as elite and unafraid of death like yours, Qin would not pose a threat.”

Xiang Shaolong relaxed as Tian Dan is only identifying his real strength and he admired his foresight.

His biggest strength lies in bringing the special forces concept into this ancient age.

And this strength was identified by Tian Dan in an instance.

After exchanging looks, Xiang Shaolong closed his eyes for a while before opening them again. Looking straight at Tian Dan's suspicious gaze, he shot, "I understand your intentions. Chancellor Tian, please give Mister some time."

Tian Dan was amazed by his forthright and direct answer. Stunned, he joyfully praised, "I acknowledge Brother Dong as a sentimental man with strong emotions. Otherwise, you would not have risked your life saving Lord Longyang. If it was anyone else, they would save their own skin first."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be under some pain and his eyebrows frowned. Shaking his head, he said, "My mind is blank at the point in time. All I know is we are on the same boat and should face danger together."

Tian Dan eyes shone and he asked in a deep voice, "According to Lord Longyang, Brother Dong had a premonition of the incoming danger. How did Brother Dong foretell the future?"

Under his penetrating gaze, Xiang Shaolong was very uncomfortable and wished he could leave immediately. Pretending to be tired, he simply answered, "I have been with horses longer than anyone. I may have picked up their sensitivity to surroundings. Before every natural disaster or extreme change in weather, all birds, animals and insects are known to exhibit strange behaviour."

After all, Xiang Shaolong is not a criminal. He cannot interrogate him nonstop.

Tian Dan commented, "Brother Dong is an extraordinary talent. The assassin must have been very unlucky to run into Brother Dong, resulting in his failure. The Chu King may have overlooked your capabilities but how would Lord Chunshen Huang He (Zhao Mu's dad, Li Yuan's master) let you go?"

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. This man possesses the highest intellect. If he is let slips any detail, he may be blackmailed by him. He joked, "Lord Chunshen may not even remember how I look; what is there not to let go? I am tired of the Chu people and have no wish to bring them up anymore."

It is Tian Dan's turn to admire Xiang Shaolong's prowess. His ambiguous reply makes him even more mysterious and intelligent. Nodding, he agreed, "The people of Chu are short sighted and only look for short term gains. They refuse to learn from their mistakes and are not worth mentioning. But if Chu is led by Li Yuan one day, what are the changes Brother Dong can foresee?"

Xiang Shaolong gave a cold snort and hissed, "Li Yuan is a ungrateful and narrow-minded brat. He indulges in wine and women and got his position through dubious means. What can he possibly accomplish?"

Electricity seemed to shoot out from Tian Dan's eyes and land squarely on his face. He could not help laughing, "Brother Dong is truly someone of great judgement; how can I believe you are just an ordinary horse breeder!"

Xiang Shaolong's entire spine is freezing cold. Giving a dry cough, he humbly said, "Chancellor Tian is exaggerating."

Tian Dan officially said, "If Brother Dong knows the ways of the world, he should not remain in this declining state of Zhao. He should have better aspirations and set his sights high and far. Brother Dong is a smart man and should understand what I mean."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is naturally referring to himself. He felt great relief and eased himself on his pillow. He released a huge sigh and kept his silence.

Tian Dan may be eloquent and highly persuasive but he is still helpless at Xiang Shaolong's silence. Giving in, he implored, "What is holding Brother Dong's tongue?"

Xiang Shaolong pretending to be in discomfort and forced himself to sit up. He supported himself by the bed rest and cried, "It is my father's dying wishes that I return to Zhao to farm animals. Everything is fated and I usually don't give a damn about things. Chancellor Tian and I have a great affinity for each other and I am thankful for our acquaintance. I need time to ponder this over and I hope Chancellor Tian can appreciate my predicament."

He is so blunt that Tian Dan can no longer force him to make a stand. He took a deep breath and surprisingly shot, "The assassin is not related to Xiang Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong was startled. Acting stupid, he asked, "How did Chancellor Tian know?"

Tian Dan stepped forward by a step and patted his shoulder lightly. He smiled, "I wish for a day when Brother Dong will visit me in Qi. I will give Mister the grandest treatment.

Please rest well! When you recover in a few days, I hope to tour your farm.”

Evading Xiang Shaolong’s question and leaving like that, Tian Dan got Xiang Shaolong filled with questions about what he has accomplished in such a visit.

At dinnertime, everyone is heavily burdened about the upcoming assassination and atmosphere is very depressing.

Zhao Zhi took a few bites and laid down her chopsticks, watching Xiang Shaolong eating with a good appetite.

Jing Jun is the only excited individual. He egged Zhao Zhi, “Sister Zhi! If you are not full, you will not have energy!”

Zhao Zhi quietly replied, “I am not hungry!”

Shan Rou scolded softly, “Useless girl. We are not the victims so why are you so nervous!”

At this moment, Tian Zhen and Tian Feng came over to pour wine for everyone.

Wu Zhuo halted, “No drinking tonight!”

He turned to Xiang Shaolong and laughed, “Lord Longyang sent two big caskets of wine. One is medicated wine; the other is tonic wine. Ha! I think third brother is in for a good time.”

Xiang Shaolong is troubled with Lord Longyang’s gratitude and concern and could not say a word. Shan Rou coldly snorted, “Letting him die would be a clean break. You had to

go and save his life and got into a whole bunch of nonsense.”

Irritated, Zhao Zhi chided, “Sister!”

Shan Rou shot her a look and demeaned, “You are only good as a noisemaker.”

Xiang Shaolong could only face Wu Zhuo and Jing Jun and smiled.

Shan Rou patted her little tummy and stretched her body. In a hoarse and harsh voice, she demanded, “I want a piece of the action tonight. Your wife is going for a quick nap. You better prepare a set of those climbing tools for me. I want the best quality.”

Everyone was dazzled by her mannerisms. She headed back to sleep as she said and one of the Tian sisters hastily escorted her back.

Zhao Zhi was shaking as she tried to apologise, “Dear Masters have a broad mind to fit your status. Please do not blame Sister Rou. She...”

Xiang Shaolong laughing interrupted, “Zhi Zhi rest easy. No one will really blame her.”

Wu Zhuo nodded in agreement, “Definitely an experienced first class assassin. She knows that it is crucial to rest and relax before any action. We must learn from her.”

At this time, Wu Guo led Pu Bu and his buddy Liu Chao in. Waiting for their news in agony, everyone was elated to see them.

After pouring out his sorrows over their earlier parting, Liu Chao started speaking, "After I got word from Pu Bu, I instantly contacted my colleagues who are deployed in Le Cheng's residence. After some investigations, we finally got something conclusive."

Everyone cheered and listened attentively.

Liu Chao explained, "Le Cheng is a very cautious person. He committed all sorts of atrocities and is afraid of revenge. His movement are highly confidential and is always surrounded by a large group of well-trained warriors. Even now, we have yet to penetrate his circle of trusted escorts."

Jing Jun was distressed, "I thought you said we have something conclusive?"

Liu Chao explained, "That is normally the case. However, Handan City is in a state of panic for the past two days. Le Cheng deployed a huge number of house guards into his escort team, so we have two brothers who managed to slip in. Otherwise, I would not dare to come and see Master Xiang."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "He seems to be afraid of me!"

Liu Chao stressed, "Master Xiang and him have deep grudges. Of course he wants to stay alive!"

Xiang Shaolong is surprised. He asked, "We have deep grudges?"

Liu Chao was alarmed, "What! Does Master Xiang not know that Shu'er is gang raped by Zhao Mu and him till death? He even tells us how he did it and he enjoyed playing with Master Xiang's woman."

"What!" Xiang Shaolong was shaking strongly.

Afraid that he may be too emotional, Wu Zhuo coaxed him and asked Liu Chao, "Where will Le Cheng be tonight?"

Liu Chao replied, "For the sake of the city's defence, he has spent most of his time in the east gate command post. He is rarely home in the last few days and couldn't wait to return to his residence."

Xiang Shaolong suppressed his grief but recollecting Shu'er's horrifying death, warm blood filled him. In a deep voice, he asked, "What is he afraid of?"

Liu Chao responded, "Madam Le is King Xiaocheng's sister, Zhao Ya's elder sister. She is a very smart woman and Le Cheng is afraid of her. All his sexual activities have to be hidden from her."

Zhao Zhi worriedly said, "If he remained in the command post tonight, what chances do we have?"

Liu Chao added, "He has three other villas which he use to house any new girls or concubines. This man is cruel and loves underage girls. The girls he tortured till death or disability are beyond calculation. Recently, an official

offended King Xiaocheng and Le Cheng was tasked to annihilate his clan. He secretly kept two concubines for his own pleasure. He has yet to visit them recently so we gauged that he will do so within these two nights.”

Xiang Shaolong finally understood why Empress Zhu Ji (Qin, Xiao Pan’s new mother) bore such hatred towards Le Cheng. Now, even without her command, he will never let him off.

Wu Zhuo continued to clarify everything he needed to know about Le Cheng, including the location of the villa used to hide the women. He also asked about Le Cheng’s personal escort team and other details. Liu Chao replied all his questions in concise details. After he finished, Wu Zhuo praised him to Xiang Shaolong, “Brother Liu is a talent and has never stop working for you.”

Liu Chao modestly replied, “After the visit from Daliang, our band of brothers is willing to lay our lives for Master Xiang anytime. In our opinion, there is not one hero who can match Master Xiang.”

Xiang Shaolong recomposed himself and nodded, “After this incident, please come back to Xianyang with me! We will share wealth and woe together and be united as one family.”

Li Chao was overjoyed and gave his thanks.

Xiang Shaolong sent him out personally and reminded him to tell his two brothers in the personal escort team to find an excuse not to depart with Le Cheng before returning to the inner hall.

Wu Zhuo and the rest had left to prepare for tonight's operations, leaving only Zhao Zhi and the beautiful pair of twins from Yue.

Xiang Shaolong had calmed down when he thought about the dead Shu'er. He felt like his heart was being stabbed and was in agony.

On his return to Handan City, he has been on the receiving end of Le Cheng's hospitality. Despite knowing it is all a false front, there had been no real sense of enmity. Now that things have changed and he wanted to tear this traitor to pieces. His death will only bring benefits to humanity.

The only issue Xiang Shaolong had with this ancient time is that women are treated like playthings or slaves. Even a Princess like Zhao Ya is also dependent on making men happy for her survival.

A person's authority should arise from an objective and fair legal system. Thinking about this, he remembered the fathers of Legalism Li Si and Han Fei Zi. He wonders if he can influence them to replace Legalism instead of Confucian governance.

After he thought deeper, he realised that as long as it is still a monarchy, real Legalism is just a reflection in the water. A reflection only and never the real thing.

Zhao Zhi slide up to him and tugged, "Master Dong! Your face is really pale and I am worried for you."

Xiang Shaolong was stricken. In this state, he is not suited to lead the assassination. But he is unable to release his agitation for Shu'er.

Reaching out and hugging Zhao Zhi's waist, he coaxed, "Zhi Zhi must stay here tonight and await my return."

Zhao Zhi thundered, "Ah! No! I must be by your side, don't look down on my swordsmanship."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his hand and patted her buttocks strongly. He officially state, "Your martial arts and swordsmanship are brilliant but you have never drawn blood before. This is a different matter altogether. Be obedient and listen to me, ok?"

Thinking about killing, Zhao Zhi gave a cold consent and lowered her head in silence.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly thought of a great way to relax. He intimately whispered besides her small ear, "Zhi Zhi you wait for me in my room. I do not want to see a piece of clothing on you. I will come and make love to you in a while; did you hear what I said?"

Happy but shy, Zhao Zhi tinkled a sweet reply before she tore away from him and ran straight into his room, not daring to look back at him.

The Tian sisters stared at them unknowingly.

Xiang Shaolong summoned the two girls before him. Hugging one on each side, he proclaimed harmoniously, "Tomorrow night is your turn!"

Sometime after the second watch.

The east gate command post's giant doors opened and out galloped two hundred over riders. In formation, they started travelling on the long street. They swerved left and entered an express lane which is part of the city wall and begin cruising.

Except for four lanterns in front and the four behind lighting the path, the centre formation travelled in total darkness, causing anyone to be unable to see clearly who is riding.

Two rows of forty riders formed a long line and they rode on the edge of the formation, one after another. They resemble a moving wall safeguarding the five groups of riders in the centre. Everyone is holding onto a large shield and is facing externally. If someone were to shoot an assassinating arrow from the houses or the streets, they are likely to miss them, much less the riders in the centre.

The centre group of riders has the most soldiers, numbering fifty. Those at the perimeter all carried tall shields, showing that there is an important person in the centre.

The remaining four groups have twenty soldiers each. They carry a long lance each and are ready to charge or use them as a throwing weapon.

Under the sickly autumn wind, one can feel the strict chill in the air.

The hoof beats shattered the tranquillity of the late night.

There are thirty over feet between each group. Even in the case of an ambush, it is hard to surround them unless the enemy has a force ten times larger. After riding for half a mile, the formation left with express lane and swerved right towards the city.

The sky is thick with clouds, hiding the moon.

The elite members trailing them quickly climbed onto higher buildings and out of sight from the formation. They signalled their nearest teammate and pinpointed Le Cheng's position.

Waiting anxiously at Le Cheng's alternative villa, Xiang Shaolong and company swiftly plotted out their travel route and laid their ambush.

Xiang Shaolong and his troops flattened themselves on roofs. Their head and faces are all securely covered with black cloth. Only their eyes are showing, resembling ghosts. Until they saw the faint light from the lanterns appearing at the far end of the street did they finally put their mind at ease.

If Le Cheng did not use this direction to return to his alternative villa, tonight's operation would have gone to waste.

As the hoof beats sounded, the prey draws nearer.

On the left Wu Zhuo analyzed, "Le Cheng may be a cruel child predator but he still holds water as Zhao's famed general. Looking at his formation, we can tell that he is well qualified."

On the right Shan Rou whispered, "Le Cheng is mine. I must cut his head personally."

Xiang Shaolong purposely twisted over and bit her ear softly before adding, "This is a city hunt. Whoever has the best ability will receive the biggest gains."

Shan Rou shot him an icy look and bend her head with disdain. Her body remained still though.

Xiang Shaolong is high with anticipation.

Right now, the lantern bearers in front have arrived at their ambush point and pass them.

Group after group of enemies rode along the long street. The atmosphere becoming more and more tense.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the time is ripe. He nudged Wu Zhuo as the biggest group of riders with Le Cheng in it entered the heart of the narrow lane below him.

Wu Zhuo let out a shrill whistle, breaking the orderly hoof beats.

The enemy is taken by surprised and looked at the two sides.

The air is filled with the sound of arrows whizzing by. Prone on the two rows of roofs, the elite troops shot out arrow after arrow, killing the horses but not the men.

The war horses' tragic cries and the angry howls of men filled everybody's ears.

The lanterns have been taken out. In the darkness, the war horses jumped wildly and it was chaos.

But the formation remained intact and this is enough to prove the Zhao army has strict training and quality soldiers.

Wu Zhuo knows that the time is appropriate and give the signal to attack.

Xiang Shaolong remained still but Shan Rou had leaped from the roof like a leopard. She dropped a few feet before she shot a cable from her climbing tool at her waist. Like heavenly soldiers descending, she landed on an empty area on the street.

In the same instant, over ten burning fireballs erupted from left and right, vaguely illuminating the enemy's position. The enemy still imagined the attackers are from the two sides. Unknown to them, the attackers have all climbed up.

The elite troops used their flying daggers to deadly perfection. By the time the enemy realised, over half of the formation has been wounded and fallen from their horses. The complete formation is now in disarray.

The rider-less horses started bumping around, adding to the chaos.

Since Le Cheng's group is the main target, it suffered the most casualties. Fifty over men are down to nearly twenty. The remaining survivors continue falling off their horses.

Those hit by flying daggers are wounded on the face or the chest, transforming this peaceful long street into a living hell of corpses and carcasses.

Xiang Shaolong used his waist cable and descends onto the street.

Before his foot touch the ground, he sent out two palms on his right and left. Unable to feint, two enemies on horseback received the palm on the face and fell off their horses. When he landed, Blood wave was drawn out and he killed two of his three attackers. The last man was stabbed by Shan Rou from the back and tragically yelled before falling towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong stepped aside and scanned the area. The fireballs are still burning on the floor and ten over personal escorts are shielding the calm-looking Le Cheng as they retreated to a back alley.

With shouts of “Kill” ringing the street, the elite soldiers leaped out from both sides. Carrying giant axes, they slayed the remaining foes and left Le Cheng’s group alone without support.

Xiang Shaolong winked at Wu Zhuo, leading four of their troops for the kill.

Like a tigress breaking free, Shan Rou rushed to their backs and shot out a flying dagger. She shot later but she hit the target first. Before Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo make a kill, the dagger hit the throat of an enemy, proving her assassination skills.

Le Cheng roared, “Attack!”

Five men advanced to meet Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo while he continues to retreat.

Xiang Shaolong shouted, "Le Cheng you traitor, let me Xiang Shaolong take your worthless life!"

Le Cheng has entered the back alley. Confident, he grinned, "Come if you dare!"

Shan Rou dashed past Xiang Shaolong, her sword waving ferociously, engaging the enemy before he could.

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo were afraid that she may fail and quickly attacked. The swords and sabres flashed and the aura of death was all around.

These men are Le Cheng's best swordsmen and they defended their attacks well. Le Cheng was about to turn and run into other alleys when his bodyguards were felled by arrows.

Leading more men, Jing Jun jumped down from the roof and forced Le Cheng and his troops to panic and head back to the main street.

Those in front can no longer hold back and start falling into their own pool of blood. Helplessly, Le Cheng commanded, "Come with me!"

The remaining six men accompanied him back to where Xiang Shaolong was.

Le Cheng let out a howl and drew his own sword. Fast as lightning, he exchanged three stances with Xiang Shaolong.

His arm strength is not as strong as Xiang Shaolong. In the last strike, he lost his balance and retreated three steps. Killing the rest of the enemy, Jing Jun somersaulted and sent two flying legs to Le Cheng's back.

"Piak!"

Both feet hit Le Cheng at the same time and on the same level as his heart.

Le Cheng staggered and fell forward, his helmet landing on the floor.

A sword flashed. Having just killed another enemy, Shan Rou pounced out from nowhere and overtook Xiang Shaolong. In a cry of triumph, Le Cheng's head dropped onto the floor. Decapitated, he died tragically on the spot.

Wu Zhou held up the lifeless head and gave the order to retreat.

The cables hanging from the roofs were retrieved, leaving no evidence.

The entire operation, taking less effort than to boil a cup of tea, completely highlights the highly efficient and explosive attacking power of the elite forces.

Other than the strong flames, the floor is littered with carcasses and the blood soaked corpses of the Zhao soldiers.

CHAPTER 4

The New City Commander

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

ZHAO MU came to talk to Xiang Shaolong in the earliest hours of daylight. His eyes were lined with red veins and were flashing with uncertainty. Obviously, he has lost his footing.

Xiang Shaolong is still in bed. Half-conscious, he struggled to stay awake. Holding his blanket, he enquired, "Why is Marquis's complexion worse than myself?"

Zhao Mu sat on his bed side was deep in thought. Finally, he replied in a deep voice, "How are your injuries?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to move his limbs with difficulty and act tough. He gave a bored answer, "It is just superficial wounds but I caught a bad chill. After lying for a whole day and night I am feeling much better."

Zhao Mu did not find anything suspicious. In fact, all those who survived Lord Longyang assassination are still bedridden. It would be strange if only Xiang Shaolong is walking around full of energy.

"Ai!" Zhao Mu cried. "Le Cheng ran into trouble last night!"

Shaken, Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "What!?"

Looking at Xiang Shaolong's eyes wide open, Zhao Mu added, "Le Cheng was assassinated on his way home last night. Even his head was chopped off. Two hundred over personal armed escorts were either dead or heavily injured. Ai!"

Aghast, Xiang Shaolong questioned, "That Xiang Shaolong is really so powerful?"

Zhao Mu coldly said, "The residents of the neighbouring houses did hear someone saying he is Xiang Shaolong himself. But all this attackers are masked and no one can really be sure of their identity. After further investigations, we discovered another batch of soldiers was killed at the east wall, leaving only their climbing ropes. We did not find any footprints outside the city wall though."

Energized, Xiang Shaolong concluded, "In this case, Xiang Shaolong must be hiding in the city. Marquis must dig him out quickly."

Zhao Mu angrily shot back, "Do I need you to teach me to do this? The entire Handan City has been flipped over. Unless Xiang Shaolong and his men can burrow underground like rats, they will leave some traces. But we have yet to even detect his shadow. Can you explain to me what the hell is going on?"

Zhao Mu was in a bad mood and lost his usual courtesy towards this Dong Horse Fanatic.

Xiang Shaolong was laughing inside. Faking a thinking face, he asked after a while, "Who will be the new commander?"

Zhao Mu responded, "Based on the current situation, it will be Cheng Dan!"

His face changing colours, Xiang Shaolong mused, "This is bad for us."

Zhao Mu recovered, "You finally understand. Le Cheng's death only benefits King Xiaocheng and not Xiang Shaolong. If Xiang Shaolong wants to kill, it will be long before Le Cheng's turn. King Xiaocheng has always been cruel. It could even be Zhao Ya's instigation. If Xiang Shaolong can really come and go as he wishes, King Xiaocheng and I will be dead long ago."

Biting his teeth, Xiang Shaolong proposed, "The first mover gains the advantage. If Marquis can poison him through Zhao Queen, this will solve all our problems."

Zhao Mu bitterly replied, "Do you think she is my subordinate? She will not be so stupid to be directly involved in the assassination. But if we manage to kill that muddle-headed King Xiaocheng, I have a way to control her. Ai! What should I do now?"

Xiang Shaolong was delighted to comprehend the relationship between Zhao Mu and Zhao Queen – they were only making use of each other.

Zhao Mu saw that Xiang Shaolong is keeping very quiet and thought he is thinking about how to save them. He released a very long sigh before summarizing, "Some things cannot be rushed. It is my great fortune to have a nameless superman like you so I am not defeated yet. But without Le Cheng, my power will diminish greatly and Tian Dan will not be as friendly as usual."

Standing up, he finished "Rest well and heal your injuries first! I still have to visit other people and calm their nerves. You try to gather more news from Zhao Ya and see what other moves King Xiaocheng is planning."

Xiang Shaolong advised, "Marquis, please be careful of people changing sides. The mind is unfathomable. Things are not as easy as they always seem!"

Displeased, Zhao Mu said, "How can I not know this? I will contact you in the future."

After he left, Xiang Shaolong remained in bed and was filled with thoughts.

When the Tian sisters came in and helped him to wash up, Shan Rou skipped in energetically like a little girl. Grinning, she approached his back and used her shoulder to knock him lightly and proudly asked, "Who killed the biggest tiger?"

"Another tigress, I admit my inferiority," came Xiang Shaolong's irritated reply. He reached behind and held her closely against his own back, giving him much excitement.

Shan Rou was in her best mood and did not resist his molest. She curiously mentioned, "We only have ten over injuries; This is indeed miraculously. Nobody will believe even if we say it. Why not we kill Tian Dan as well, then I will do whatever you wish. Zhao Zhi and I can be another pair of Tian sisters."

Both Tian sisters turned red-faced.

Xiang Shaolong could feel a headache coming. Changing the topic, he asked, "Where is your nice sister?"

Shan Rou broke free from his back embrace and chirped, "Don't change the topic! What kind of hero are you?"

As she was combing his hair, Tian Zhen softly mentioned, "Miss Zhi is out gathering news. Aiyah!"

She was pinched by Shan Rou.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and folded his sleeves shouting, "This is the first time I have seen such an

unreasonable woman. Let me use my wild-horse-taming skill on you shrew! ”

Jutting out her chest, Shan Rou faced him with her almond shaped eyes challenged, “You dare!”

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng knew that he is putting up a show and held their laughter while peeping.

Xiang Shaolong used his large palm and poked her face. Before she could retaliate, he withdrew and joked, “Sister has improved; now she only uses her hands and not her daggers.”

Shan Rou giggled and bats her eyelid at him, showcasing her charm and adorability. Xiang Shaolong was aroused and wanted to give her a bear hug but Shan Rou slipped out of his grasp. Sliding to the door, she smiled departing, “You have not skilled enough to gain my favour. Go home and train for a few more years!”

She disappeared laughing but the tinkle of her laughter remains in the air.

Xiang Shaolong was mad and gnashed his teeth. Tian Feng smilingly commented, “Miss Rou does carry a torch for Master Dong. She often chats with us about you.”

Embracing their two waists, Xiang Shaolong softly asked, “What about the both of you?”

Both girls squirmed in embarrassment and lowered their heads.

The two similar looking girls with two different attitudes have reignited the desire started by Shan Rou in Xiang Shaolong. Assessing that Handan City will be in mayhem today and that all his sick visitors have come, he would have plenty of free time today. If he did not enjoy his jade beauties, there would be no better time.

Minds and bodies as one, the chamber is filled passion.

The long awaited rewards for these two beauties were finally bestowed to them in this beautiful moment.

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, Tian Zhen and Tian Feng's enticing bodies are intertwined with his like an octopus securing its prey. A slight movement by him cause the two exceedingly charming sisters to awake in fright.

Both girls looked outside the window and saw the break of dawn. Startled, they stumbled out of bed.

Xiang Shaolong was overwhelmed by physical scrambling of the sisters jade bodies. He nearly wanted to pull them back into bed but recalling Handan's situation, he forced himself to get out of bed too.

The two girls were delighted to wash up and change for him.

Happiness and joy shone out of their faces, making Xiang Shaolong delirious. His hands worked non-stop like them, causing both girls' ears to turn deep red before he left.

The main hall was totally quiet and no one can be seen.

Xiang Shaolong was enjoying the rare tranquillity. Feeling lazy, he abandoned all thoughts and walked over to a sofa and lied down.

Tian Zhen was tidying some clothes when she swayed over and kneeled down beside him. In a crystal clear voice, she asked, "What does Master Dong long to eat? I will prepare it for you."

Reminded by her words, his stomach rumbled like a drum. Patting her face, he replied, "Anything is fine! Hei! Where has that tigress gone to?"

Tian Zhen could not resist replying, "The tigress is naturally sleeping in the tiger den in daytime. Little Feng is attending to her."

Finished, she left cheerfully.

Xiang Shaolong closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep when Jing Jun and Zhao Zhi returned one after another. Neither of them brought back any negative reports. Xiang Shaolong could finally see the clouds clearing and put down a burden on his mind.

With Le Cheng gone, the stakes have changed and he now holds the initiative.

As Jing Jun and Zhao Zhi ate with him, Zhao Zhi commented, "I have never seen Handan City in such a state. The streets are full of soldiers and every household is being searched and interrogated. Even all our martial warriors at the school

have been despatched to help out, causing widespread panic.”

As Xiang Shaolong stuffed himself, he asked, “Did anyone suspect it was my work?”

Looking at him with utmost admiration and worship, she chuckled, “Master Dong is famous for his flying needles. Because none were used, everyone is highly suspicious. Zhao Ba even suspects the mastermind to be Li Yuan. Hei! This is so funny!”

Jing Jun added, “I have never seen Sister Zhi so happy before.”

Zhao Zhi shot him a glare and cried, “Busybody!”

Jing Jun quickly smilingly apologised.

This is called everything has its relationship with one another, Xiang Shaolong thought. “Where is big brother?” he asked.

Jing Jun answered, “He is back at the farm.” Lowering his voice, he added, “Now that the Zhao soldiers are searching the population, we should take the chance to send the injured brothers back to the farm for healing and cover a potential loophole.”

Xiang Shaolong was relieved.

Wu Zhuo is clever and cautious and will have a good excuse.

Jing Jun continued, “Big brother had wanted to speak to third brother but third brother ... Hei!”

Zhao Zhi stared and questioned, "Why are you stuttering, Little Jun? What is wrong is Third Brother?"

Xiang Shaolong is unafraid of Zhao Zhi. His hand snaked under the table and began to feel her thigh. This appealing beauty instantly kept quiet and lowered her head.

Tian Feng walked out of the kitchen, holding a huge jar of wine. She asked, "Does Master Dong want to try Lord Longyang's tonic wine?"

Jing Jun clapped and yelled, "This is what he needs right now! You should join us for a drink too."

Both girls' petite faces start to become hot.

Xiang Shaolong found the situation very ironic. He whistled, "Unless you are too weak to absorb the nutrients, every man needs this stuff. Come! Get Zhen Zhen to join us too and let's celebrate."

Time passes by in this happy setting.

In the evening, a fresh Shan Rou left her bedroom and dragged Zhao Zhi to the backyard and prayed to their departed parents.

Jing Jun loved excitement. Leading ten over experts, he went out to spy but was actually out to party.

Xiang Shaolong did not stop him as he agrees that it will give them more knowledge about Handan City's current affairs.

He was pining for Ji Yanran but knows that he must stay indoors. The only way to suppress this yearning was to seek

out Tian Zhen and Tian Feng, pleasuring them to the maximum.

All the other men only love their bodies; who is willing to share their sorrows?

Zhao Zhi is unofficially his mistress and moved in as well. He could not bear to contradict her action. After dinner, he was intended on a quiet night when there was a sudden visitor – it is Marquis Pingshan Han Chuang.

Sitting in the hall, Han Chuang scrutinized his complexion and nodded, “Brother Dong is fitter than his horses. Your complexion has improved so much. Does the wound still hurt?”

“Thanks for Marquis’s concern. I am indeed much better today. Ai! General Le Cheng left so unexpectedly,” replied Xiang Shaolong.

Han Chuang revealed a cold air and spoke with disdain, “There are some people in this world that can die suddenly and no one can guess who the murderer is. This is because they have harmed too many people. If I may, I would love to stab him myself. In the past when he was guarding the Zhao-Han border, he often trespassed my area and committed atrocities. Both his hands are full of blood. Humph!”

Xiang Shaolong was mortified. He normally saw Han Chuang and Le Cheng behaving like close brothers but they were hiding these deep grudges. Feigning surprise, he exclaimed, “General Le Cheng is really such a person?”

Han Chuang cut in, “Forget this man. Let’s discuss about the future.”

Xiang Shaolong muttered to himself. Does this man want to use me to face off Li Yuan?

Han Chuang received his tea from Tian Feng and lecherously looked at her back frame. Swallowing his saliva, he recomposed himself and described, “On your return to Zhao, you would hope to carve out a prosperous career. Ultimately, horse-breeding is just horse-breeding. The most you can be the next Wu Family. You will never hold an official post, do you understand Brother Dong?”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself – even if I am the real Dong Kuang, I would never go to Han as it is even weaker than Zhao. Putting up a false front, he started, “I am grateful that Marquis recognizes my talent. But...”

Han Chuang interrupted, “Brother Dong is mistaken. If ever you wish to come to my state, I welcome you with open arms. But today’s topic is about the vacancy of the City Commander created by Le Cheng’s death.”

Xiang Shaolong was befuddled. Han Chuang is a Han citizen. When is his turn to meddle with the affairs of Zhao? The City Commander is equivalent to the biggest protector of Zhao King and is someone the Zhao King would trust the most. He would never try to vie for this position even in his dreams.

Han Chuang proudly revealed, “Brother Dong would have never guessed that the Zhao Queen has Han roots. Through her, I am able to influence Zhao politics to a certain extent.”

Xiang Shaolong then remembered that Zhao Queen is part of the plan to unite the three states. The Han royalty married to King Xiaocheng would naturally have some connections to Han Chuang. Kicking himself for this oversight, he confessed, "I have no idea at all!"

Han Chuang loftily added, "If I put in a few words for you to Zhao Queen, she can influence King Xiaocheng's decision."

After Zhao Mu's decline in power, Zhao Ya and Zhao Queen are the two people who have the most influence on King Xiaocheng.

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. Like Lord Longyang, he had underestimated Han Chuang. This man is always lusting after Zhao Ya. Besides her body, the more crucial reason is to manipulate King Xiaocheng through her. He can even conquer Zhao without bloodshed. From this point of view, Zhao Mu is at best a little pawn in the hand of Zhao Queen.

In this warring period, everyone survives by acquiring information. National conspiracies are all executed openly and discreetly.

Frowning, he asked, "Didn't King Xiaocheng get Cheng Dan to succeed Le Cheng?"

Han Chuang scolded angrily, "Who the hell is Cheng Dan? He stole some of Xiang Shaolong's credit to attain his present position. His prestige and abilities are insufficient to win the hearts and minds of his subordinates. In this urgent situation, he is only temporary assigned to take charge!"

Xiang Shaolong was agitated. If he is the City Commander, capturing Zhao Mu will be the easiest thing on earth. Disbelieving King Xiaocheng's naivety, he bitterly joked, "I have been in Handan City for a short while only. My seat is not even warm yet and I don't even qualify in the first place. Marquis need not waste the effort."

Still highly enthusiastic, Han Chuang encouraged, "Brother Dong is too humble. Everyone in Handan City knows you and your popularity is sky high. From the gift of a thousand war horses, the dissing of the Chu people, the gate-crashing, the saving of Lord Longyang, etc. If you become the City Commander, there will be no one who can offer a better candidate."

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "One gate-crashing is not enough to change Zhao King's opinion."

Han Chuang smiled craftily and continued, "Black can be twisted to white and white can be twisted to black. All it takes is a mouth. If King Xiaocheng appoints you, it also shows he is open-minded, generous and good at utilising talents. Brother Dong is all prepared but only lacks the mouth. I can even influence Zhao Ya and have both of them speak up for you. What more is there to worry by then?"

Xiang Shaolong is finally blown over and his heart is rejuvenated. He looked at Han Chuang suspiciously and asked, "This act of kindness; what can I do to repay Marquis?"

Han Chuang saw that he is tempted and is just as happy. He laughed loudly, "We are all family and there is no need for such words! Come! Let me arrange for you to meet the Queen and we can talk about the rest later."

He stood up and turned around.

Xiang Shaolong pretends to get up forcefully and send him to the door.

As they walked, Han Chuang advised, "Do not get involved with Zhao Mu or Guo Zhong. At the same time, do not offend Zhao Ya or Guo Kai. This way, the City Commander's position will be yours. Hey! King Xiaocheng is very impressed with your saving of Lord Longyang."

"Has Lord Longyang recovered?" Xiang Shaolong queried.

Han Chuang hissed, "If you need one day to recover, he will need at least ten days! Oh! Are the twin sisters thrilling?"

How can Xiang Shaolong not understand his intention? Cursing to himself, he whispered, "I can send them to keep you company but we better be discreet and do not let others suspect our relationship. When I am appointed the City Commander, then we will have no fear."

Han Chuang reluctantly sighed, "Brother Dong is right. Better to be discreet. Once I have word from Zhao Queen, I will notify you immediately."

Sending off Han Chuang, Xiang Shaolong wanted to shout out for joy and express the joy and excitement in his heart.

Who would have guessed that killing Le Cheng will bring about this wonderful ending?

CHAPTER 5

Stealing The Bell While Covering The Ears

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG had yet to turn back to his residence when Zhao Ya's carriage passed Han Chuang's carriage and entered the driveway.

Xiang Shaolong sighed and approached her carriage, opening the door personally.

Zhao Ya simply stared at him and asked softly, "Can you get up and start walking?"

Flexing his limbs, he escorted her into the hall and answered, "If I continue to stay in bed, I will be bored to death"

Zhao Ya jested, "You are healthier than Lord Longyang. He is still bedridden. He probably needs another ten odd days before he recovers completely."

She continued in a low voice, "What did Han Chuang say to you?"

Xiang Shaolong did not want her to run into Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi and led her to the east guestroom. Without a care, he said, "Nothing worth mentioning. That lecher saw the twin sisters I had and wanted to borrow them for a night. I turned him away instead. Humph! So what if he is unhappy, I hate this kind of perverts."

His words are half true. It is true that Han Chuang did have that intention. It is untrue as it is not his actual motive. Zhao Ya could not distinguish the truth and nodded in agreement, adding a few words criticising Han Chuang.

Xiang Shaolong was guilt-ridden. Seriously speaking, he is not better off than Han Chuang. He is also the one who snatched the Tian sisters from Zhao Mu. The only difference is that they followed him willingly!

Out of a sudden, Zhao Ya grabbed his arm and led him out of the side door into the garden. As they walked to the pond at the centre of the garden, she whispered, "What is the relationship between Zhao Mu and you? Why did he take special care of you? Why did he look for you so early today morning?"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback. Knowing that she is working for King Xiaocheng, he shrugged his shoulders and insisted, "You ask me; I ask who? I have no need to explain to anyone why someone is treating me well or ill-treating me! I don't give a damn."

They reached the poolside and Zhao Ya dragged him to sit down together before laughing, "I love to see your angry look; it is like watching a stubborn child."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be upset but was very intimidated. Based on her attention to details, his winking at Zhao Mu (during Tian Dan's dinner) could not escape her eyes. He wonders if she has reported this to King Xiaocheng.

Zhao Ya innocently leaned on him. Wrinkling her nose, she complained, "Oh! You are reeking of herbal smells. It is clogging my nose!"

Xiang Shaolong rudely shot, "Nobody asked you to follow me!"

Zhao Ya laughed like a blossoming tree and looks like she is enjoying herself.

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "Your old flame entered the city to commit murder and you can still be carefree and unbothered. Just what in the world is going on?"

Zhao Ya smoothly picked a yellow leaf from a short tree and sniffed on it, "This leaf is more fragrant than you."

Stunned, Xiang Shaolong demanded, "Are you not listening to me?"

Zhao Ya's beautiful gaze floated over. Batting her eye, she replied, "Your voice is so special and full of character. I cannot stop listening even if I want to."

Followed by a giggle, she chuckled, "Dong Horse Fanatic is just like the others, thinking that it is Xiang Shaolong who did the killings. The ignorant cannot be blamed. You were not aware of Handan's affairs so you can only guess blindly."

Xiang Shaolong was laughing to himself but on the outside, he gnashed his teeth cursing, "Who else can it be that hates Le Cheng so much that he must kill him?"

Zhao Ya leaned even closer with half of her enticing chest resting on his arm. She threw the leaf into the river and looked up to the moon and spoke softly, "Must you hate someone to kill him? If you want to know who may be Le Cheng's killer, you must first tell me what did Zhao Mu said this morning. Ai! Didn't you know that I am concerned about you?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "You are really concerned about me? I think you are more afraid that I may die and cannot detain the real Xiang Shaolong."

Zhao Ya's face reddened and cooed, "I am concerned about both of you! Frank enough? Tell me quick."

Xiang Shaolong was mesmerized by her tireless spirit and evoked his past happy memories where they often have the usual couple's tiff. Charmed, he was lost in thought.

A smile formed on Zhao Ya's face and she sighed; "You are always in your own world and do not care about me. Handan City is full of danger and any mistake would lead to the annihilation of your entire clan. I cannot protect you and you are still acting angry."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be perplexed and replied, "He did not tell me any secrets but came to ask me more about Chu. I could tell that the Marquis of Julu was troubled and I guessed he must have been traumatized by the formidable old flame of yours."

After a moment's thought, Zhao Ya faintly said, "This matter should be kept from you but I am afraid that you may get involved with Zhao Mu so I have to force it out from you."

Xiang Shaolong was delighted to know that his guess was accurate. Le Cheng is a two-headed snake whose loyalty is shuffling between King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu. Both parties will suspect each other to be the mastermind.

Zhao Ya reached to his ear and disclosed, "Zhao Mu is the chief suspect in Le Cheng's death."

Xiang Shaolong feigned shock and cried, "What!?"

Zhao Ya stated, "That's all you need to know and do not ask anymore. Ai! Zhao Mu is really stupid, measuring others by his own yardstick and made this wrong move. King Xiaocheng no longer has any hesitation about this man and will not hold back anymore."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "In this case, why didn't King Xiaocheng seize Zhao Mu immediately?"

Zhao Ya coldly snorted, "Did you know how Le Cheng died? Over two hundred of his best men killed or injured in the time needed to boil a cup of tea. Zhao Mu did not have such capabilities and must have received assistance from someone. Besides, we have no evidence and dare not act rashly. The king had wanted to recall Lian Po or Li Mu but we will fall into the mastermind's trap. Ai! We are all in a dilemma."

"Oh, heavens," Xiang Shaolong told himself. Even Tian Dan has been embroiled into this case. Maybe Li Yuan will be implicated sooner or later. Le Cheng's death has brought about many effects.

Thinking ahead, Xiang Shaolong acted alarmed, "Guess I better head out to the farm tomorrow and leave this place of deceit. I will focus on horse-breeding and occasional pleasures of the flesh and happily live this life."

Zhao Ya whined, "If you really leave, then what is to become of me?"

Xiang Shaolong declared, "You are you; I am I. What has Princess got to do with me? You promised to be frank and only shared little titbits of information with me like I am begging you for it. I seriously don't give a hoot about your information. If not for your soothing touches, I would have thrown you out of the house and here you dare to ask me what is to become of you!"

Not only was Zhao Ya not offended, she was laughing till she nearly couldn't catch her breath. Holding her belly in pain, she asked, "Have you fulfilled your promise? You only know how to anger others. Ai! Times passes fast when I am with you. Too bad I still have to visit my brother in the palace. Shall I come by to accompany you later?"

Xiang Shaolong moaned, "If you want my wounds to reopen and bleed, then come and find me! This is called sacrificing blood to accompany the jade beauty"

Zhao Ya cried, "You rejected me again; am I not attractive to you?"

Xiang Shaolong started to undress and hissed, "If you don't believe, feel free to check out my body."

Zhao Ya laughingly helped him up and exclaimed, "I take my hat off you! Not an inch of shame and decency. I'll need to go off. Can you send me to the door?"

Holding hands, Xiang Shaolong led her back to the east room, through the corridor and back to the courtyard.

Zhao Ya was in great spirits and began to hum a tune that Xiang Shaolong used to hear from her frequently.

Xiang Shaolong could not endure and asked, "Why is Princess exceedingly happy tonight?"

Zhao Ya's complexion suddenly darkened and she lowered her head in silence. Until she reached the external ground and boarded her carriage did she held onto the window and waved to him softly saying, "After Xiang Shaolong's

departure, I thought of suicide on many occasions but that will only benefit Zhao Mu. I had also hoped to be able to do something for Xiang Shaolong. Now that success is nearing, how can I not be delighted?"

Xiang Shaolong could feel his hostility reducing and his mind is in turmoil. Following her lead, he asked, "If Zhao Mu is dead, what are your plans?"

Her face becoming burning red. Gazing at Xiang Shaolong with strong feelings, she said, "At first I did not know what to do. After your insolent attack yesterday, I know I have found someone to replace Xiang Shaolong. No one else will suffice. Does Master Dong understand my thinking?"

The blind was lowered, blocking Xiang Shaolong's sight.

Even though the horse carriage has gone far, he is still stoned on the courtyard, tasting an indescribable sensation.

Shan Rou and Jing Jun were waiting in the hall. Shan Rou is enthusiastically poring over a map laid on the table while Jing Jun is yawning and couldn't wait to get away.

"Where are they?" Xiang Shaolong asked.

Shan Rou impatiently answered, "Who knows if you are coming back? I have sent them to sleep first."

With a pained expression, Jing Jun pleaded, "I did not sleep the whole day like sister; why didn't you send me to sleep too?"

Shan Rou rolled up the map and glared at him, "Are your legs grown on my body? You did not go to sleep on your own and now you are blaming others."

Jing Jun shot back, "Earlier, I said I wanted to sleep. Who is the one who dragged me out to check out the map?"

Lacking a good reason, she gave him a strong shove and chimed, "Get lost! I have someone to accompany me now."

Jing Jun shook his head helplessly and gave Xiang Shaolong a look of sympathy before disappearing like a burst of smoke.

Putting aside Zhao Ya's issue, Xiang Shaolong sat opposite Shan Rou and asked, "Let me see what ugly drawing you have done."

Shan Rou was about to reopen the map but hid the map behind her upon hearing his words. Her almond eyes staring at him, she spit, "I dare you to repeat that!"

Giving in, Xiang Shaolong toned down, "My good sister. Will you please allow me to admire your masterpiece that was resulted of your dedicated sweat, blood and tears?"

From annoyance to joyfulness, Shan Rou laid out the map and hummed, "Dedicated sweat, blood and tears? You are so good at exaggeration."

Focusing on the map, Xiang Shaolong was quickly absorbed.

It is a geographic map of both within Handan City and the outlying areas. The details are precise and stunning. Although it is not as good as satellite pictures of the 21st

Century, it is still a rare piece of work. Xiang Shaolong did not expect Shan Rou to be so talented but on the other hand, this is a basic requisite of an outstanding assassin.

Shan Rou was pleased that Xiang Shaolong is giving the map plenty of attention. She began pointing out several key points and explaining them.

Xiang Shaolong could not stop nodding his head and committing the information to memory.

When Shan Rou finished, he heard the street watchman shouting the time. It was the third watch.

Xiang Shaolong gave a big stretch and yawned, "Can you accompany me to sleep?"

Shan Rou turned red-faced, shot him a glare and folded her map. Shaking her head, she rejected, "I am not sleepy at all. You go ahead on your own! Zhi Zhi is in my room. If you like it, you can carry your biggest fan to your room."

Xiang Shaolong casually replied, "If you do not want to sleep, so be it!" and entered his own room.

Shan Rou jumped out with both hands on her waist interrupting, "Hey!"

Xiang Shaolong was amused. Halting but not turning around, he asked with his back facing her, "What advice does Miss Shan has for me?"

Shan Rou demanded, "Are you willing to help us sisters against Tian Dan or not?"

Turning his well-built frame around, he put one hand out and offered, "Come! Let's talk more in bed."

Both of Shan Rou's cheeks turned reddish, adding more charm to this graceful beauty. Staring harshly at him and stomped her feet saying, "Who is afraid of going! If you are lying to me, I will kill you with one stroke of my dagger."

Xiang Shaolong smilingly walked to her and pulled her soft and warm hand, leading her back to his room.

One step into the room, Shan Rou gave a violent struggle and pulled her hand back from his iron grip. She turned and tried to leave.

Xiang Shaolong moved quickly and blocked her way taunting, "I thought we have agreed?"

Shan Rou's face was burning like fire. She use her hand to press against his chest to avoid falling into his embrace. "No! No deal!"

She shook her head strongly. She withdrew her hand, stood straight up but lowered her head to avoid his devilish gaze.

Xiang Shaolong was very aroused and laughed, "This is not the first time we shared a bed together, why is there no deal this time?"

Shan Rou shook her head violently and blushed, "No! I know this time it will be different."

Xiang Shaolong noticed that she still dare not look straight at him and commented, "So the fierce like a tiger sister Shan also had a frightened and shy side of her!"

Shan Rou forcefully raised her fully-red face. Catching his eyes, she was frightened into lowering her head again. Stamping her feet, she whined, "Are you giving way or not?"

Xiang Shaolong started to unbutton her dress and plainly replied, "Feel free to use your dagger!"

Under his caress, Shan Rou could not even stand straight, not to mention using her dagger.

Trembling, she cried, "Ah! Please let me go?"

Xiang Shaolong well-trained hands have already unbuttoned her outer garments, revealing her inner garments as well as the start of a deep cleavage.

Shan Rou was shaking non-stop. She closed both eyes and was breathing quickly, causing her chest to heave a lot.

Xiang Shaolong opened up her clothes beyond her shoulders and exposed her sword injury and her chest muscles. Pressing down her shoulders with his left hand, he pressed the sword scar with his right hand and asked, "Does it still hurt?"

The trembling Shan Rou yelled, "Ah! Of course it hurts! You.... Ai! Xiang Shaolong! You big bully!"

Xiang Shaolong moved his hand up and held onto her other shoulder tightly. He bent his head and kissed on the sword scar.

How can Shan Rou endure this? She groaned in the most arousing manner.

Xiang Shaolong took off her lower garments and carried her at her waist towards his bed.

Shan Rou weakly held onto his neck and buried her head in his shoulder, panting heavily. When Xiang Shaolong climbed onto the bed, she regained her strength and slipped out from his grasp and hid in one corner of the bed with her back against the wall.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling very sensual and tore after her, removing other parts of her clothing. Reminded of their earlier tussle when he saw her beautiful legs while her skirt was raised, his heart was burning with wild passion.

After a brave yet hopeless defence by Shan Rou, this normally-stubborn beauty is left with a tight and thin white singlet and a pair of sweet-smelling shorts.

Shan Rou suddenly became clear-minded and held on to her clothes while Xiang Shaolong's invading hands have grabbed her round and supple legs.

Shan Rou feebly looked at him and tremblingly pleaded, "Xiang Shaolong! We cannot do this! You haven't even closed the door!"

Xiang Shaolong was tooting with amusement. Releasing his hold on her white jade legs, he climbed down the bed and laughed, "I thought Sister you are a fearless woman. So you were actually afraid of an open door! I will do what you want!"

When he reached the bed again, Shan Rou was seated up and staring hard at him.

Xiang Shaolong was smiling from ear to ear sat in front of her with their legs touching. He leaned forward and asked, "Rou Rou, did you forget your dagger?"

Shan Rou gave a snort and gave him a charming look before scolding, "So what if I am armed? What can a dagger do against a pervert like you?"

Xiang Shaolong unscrupulously reached into her singlet and fondled her firm breasts. "You are not only a first class assassin; you are a natural stunner as well" he praised.

With her eyes full of passion, Shan Rou weakly pressed on his shoulders and whined, "Have you had enough?"

Xiang Shaolong was high on adrenaline to conquer this difficult beauty and countered, "Has Sister Rou had enough?"

Shan Rou can no longer keep her eyes open. Out of a sudden, she grabbed his evil hand through her shirt and panted, "Can you stop for a while?"

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong ever hear her speak in such a pleading tone. Letting his right hand rest between her breasts, he stopped and smiled, "So what now?"

Shan Rou forcefully opened her eyes and protested; "I had said you were up to no good. See what you have caused!"

Xiang Shaolong acted surprised, "What have I caused? I have caused you to be so mesmerizing and adorable!"

He started fondling again.

Shan Rou can no longer resist and trembled with his violations. She begged, "Can I say a few words?"

Xiang Shaolong arrogantly halt his invasion and victoriously exclaimed, "What else is there to say? You should know what is about to happen!"

Shan Rou shying lowered her head and added, "I know so I am here to negotiate with you."

Xiang Shaolong roared, "In any battle, the loser will have to be kicked out of the city. What is there to negotiate?"

Shan Rou roared back, "Who has surrendered? You only won a small battle, I... .."

Xiang Shaolong is even more turned-on. He withdrew his right hand and smiled, "Ai! I almost forgot you still have some territory that I have not conquered. You still have your capital."

When his hands retreated, Shan Rou recovered quickly and somersaulted out of his devilish claws. She rolled till she

reached the bedside and giggled, "Don't come over or I will get out of your room!"

Xiang Shaolong has no intention of pursuing. Adopting a waiting attitude, he shifted himself and leaned against the wall. Fully stretching his legs, he pointed at her and commanded, "Wifey come here obediently."

In a messy state of undress with her hair out of place, the sexy Shan Rou put her arms on her waist and snubbed, "No!"

Noticing the full-of-confidence Xiang Shaolong sitting there admiring her body, she softened and coldly offered, "Unless you promised not to molest me."

Xiang Shaolong said in a huff, "Who will retreat having tasted some victory? Shan Rou, you are a mature woman and you should know there are some things tonight that you cannot avoid."

Shan Rou gave him faint look and acceptingly moved to his side. Adopting the same posture and stretching her beautiful legs, she smoothly said, "You should know better. I know I was arrogant in masquerading as your wife but I am unwilling to subject myself like other females. Other girls are born to be slaves or concubines or courtesans but I will not accept such a fate. Ai! I do not know how to explain further."

Xiang Shaolong was filled with guilt. Shan Rou possess different views about females compared to her peers. Putting his hand around her shoulder, he locked her fragrant lips in a deep kiss and both of them were lost in paradise.

Shan Rou responded with great sensations.

After a while, Xiang Shaolong held her face in front of his own. Peering into his crystal clear eyes, he vowed, "I will respect Rou Rou's thinking. Tonight shall end here. You can sleep in my bed while I find somewhere else to sleep."

Shan Rou was lost and faintly asked, "Are you seeking Zhi Zhi or Tian sisters?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I do not want to wake them. There is another spare room right? I will sleep there."

Shan Rou was moved and said, "I have never seen someone like you who is always so considerate about other people. Fine. Let's go there together."

"Let's go together," was Xiang Shaolong's stunned reply.

Shan Rou resumed her haughty composure and curled up her mouth announcing, "If you violate me again, I will personally throw you back here to sleep alone. You are to keep this between us. Do not expect me to be as obedient as Zhi Zhi. Unless I desire you myself, you are not to take any liberties with me."

Xiang Shaolong remarked, "Aren't you stealing the bell while covering your ears?"

Shan Rou was curious, "What is stealing the bell while covering your ears?"

Xiang Shaolong explained, "The thief covered his ears while stealing the bell. When he was running and the bell was

ringing, he thought that if he cannot hear it, neither can others. Isn't that what you are doing now?"

Shan Rou bent over laughing and cried, "How is it the same? Nothing is ringing now!"

Xiang Shaolong chuckled, "Has Miss Rou forgotten that she can moan?"

Shan Rou was deeply embarrassed and forcefully pulled him down the bed hissing, "Come! It will be daybreak soon."

Xiang Shaolong was doubled up in laughter, "Rou Rou, there is evidence of your bell theft on the floor and on the bed."

In the comfortable night, two beating hearts were ringing. Both of them felt like they were having an exciting affair under the watch of the entire world.

CHAPTER 6

Each Having Their Own Motives

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

HAVING tasted the forbidden fruit, Shan Rou was much more compliant and well behaved. Early in the morning, she pretended nothing has happened and brought Zhao Zhi to practise their swordsmanship on the garden. Jing Jun was pining for his pretty village girl and left for the farm at daybreak, leaving Tian Zhen and Tian Feng to breakfast with Xiang Shaolong.

Wu Guo came in and reported, "Marquis Pingshan has sent word to invite Third Master to his residence in the afternoon."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. The person who wanted him to be the City Commander was Zhao Queen Empress Jing and not Han Chuang. Otherwise, it will not be easy for Han Chuang to fix an appointment with the First Lady of Zhao.

Thinking deeper, everything starts falling in place.

Handan City's generals were all split into different factions. He is the only one who has yet to ally with any party. If he becomes the City Commander, he will naturally be the confidant of Empress Jing. After the demise of King Xiaocheng and the power transfer to Empress Jing, he will be her most powerful weapon.

But why did she choose him?

Wu Guo saw that Xiang Shaolong was deep in thought and dared not interrupt. When he was about to take his leave, Xiang Shaolong questioned, "How is the situation outside?"

Wu Guo strictly reported, "It is more peaceful now but there are still Zhao soldiers doing checks at every main street. King Xiaocheng has sent out an official notice that no one is allowed to house any strangers and every inn is thoroughly searched."

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng like Wu Guo's character. Witnessing his strict reporting, they cannot help but laughed in secret.

While Xiang Shaolong looked away, he winked at them, adding to their happiness.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly shouted, "Wu Guo!"

Wu Guo jumped up in fright and quickly acknowledged.

Xiang Shaolong instructed, "Send word to Talented Lady Ji that I will officially visit her in the evening and want to have dinner with her."

Wu Guo received his order and left.

Full of sweat, Zhao Zhi and Shan Rou came in and sat on his two sides. The Tian sisters hurriedly see to their needs.

Recalling Shan Rou's enticing figure and wild beauty, his heart sweetened and coaxed, "Aren't the both of you going for a shower first?"

Shan Rou hesitated but Zhao Zhi joyfully complained, "But I am hungry!"

As she ate, she continued, "Sister Rou's steps have slowed down and I am able to catch up."

Xiang Shaolong understood the reason for the slowing down and nearly spit his bun out.

Shan Rou's face reddened and she pinched Xiang Shaolong's thigh fiercely under the table.

Zhao Zhi was deep in thought before enlightenment shone on her face. Her face then turned red and lowered her head, eating in an awkward atmosphere. Xiang Shaolong was humoured. Feeling both girls under the table, he then stood

up patting his stomach, mentioning, "I am going out for a walk and exercise my muscles."

Zhao Zhi yelped, "Wait for me! I nearly forgot Zhao Ba instructed me to bring you to the martial school."

Xiang Shaolong joked, "Is this considered an invitation?"

Zhao Zhi's face was fiery red by now and she retorted, "Your legs are not grown on my body; Who cares where you are going."

Smiling sweetly, she batted her eyelids and left.

Xiang Shaolong faced the Shan Rou who is still eating and added, "We'll wait for sister!"

Shan Rou gave a loud howl and kicked over with her leg.

Xiang Shaolong avoided and smiled, "My good Rou Rou. Do you still think your kicks are as formidable as last night, nearly taking my life?"

Smoke coming out from her ears, Shan Rou picked up a bun and threw it at his face. Xiang Shaolong caught the bun neatly and took a bite. "Sister Rou tastes better," he said after a short moment of thinking.

As Shan Rou pounced up like a mad tiger, he has followed Zhao Zhi and slipped into the bath house.

He spent the entire morning at the martial school. When Zhao Ba brought up 'Long Shan', Xiang Shaolong gave the excuse that he was at the farm.

As Zhao Zhi was directing fifty female warriors in their practice routines, Zhao Ba pulled Xiang Shaolong aside and intimately said, "I was summoned to the palace last night by King Xiaocheng and your name came up."

Stunned, Xiang Shaolong asked, "What?!"

Zhao Ba continued in a low voice, "He wanted to hear about how you and Long Shan battled Li Yuan. Naturally, I was full of praise."

Xiang Shaolong quickly gave his thanks but his heart was muttering in turmoil.

King Xiaocheng may not be so astute to discover any suspicious points about him but the crafty and intelligent Guo Kai may raise some suspicions about this horse-breeding army. Of course, King Xiaocheng may be just thinking of a suitable position for him and is seeking advice from Zhao's chief Martial trainer.

From Zhao Ba's words, there must be other stuff that King Xiaocheng had spoken about. He must ask Zhao Zhi later if she knows anything.

For everyone's safety, he has to win over Zhao Ya and use her to investigate Guo Kai's schemes. Anyway, Zhao Ya had deceived him before. When he deceived her in return, this wanton woman can only accept her fate.

After lunch, Xiang Shaolong left Zhao Zhi at the martial school and went to Han Chuang's residence alone.

Handan City is slowly regaining its former peace but the pedestrians are much lesser. He met some soldiers occasionally and everyone paid respects to him. He felt more prestigious than his former position of Zhao's Number One Warrior.

Han Chuang's residence is swarming with strict Zhao soldiers. Xiang Shaolong deduced that Empress Jing has arrived even before him.

Why is she so anxious about him? Maybe she has a motive and needs someone she can trust to become Handan City's City Commander and this newcomer is the best choice.

He remember that Empress Jing and Zhao Ya were not on good terms at Tian Dan's feast. If Empress Jing recommends other people for the post, Zhao Ya may object but if it was Dong Horse Fanatic, Zhao Ya may adopt a different attitude altogether.

After the servant's report, Han Chuang came to receive him in the main hall. He brought Xiang Shaolong to a side hall and suspiciously emphasize, "Be careful when you speak later. This sister Empress is very formidable. If you say anything wrong, your City Commander promotion will be gone."

Han Chuang continued, "On this trip to Handan City, I have another mission – which is to escort my State's seventh Princess here to marry the Crown Prince. Empress Jing use her as an excuse to visit so there will be no loopholes."

Xiang Shaolong was amazed. This political marriage must be put together by Empress Jing. Among the six states, Zhao and Han are on much better terms.

Taking this chance, Xiang Shaolong asked about the alliance treaty. Frustrated, Han Chuang cursed, "Using Yan as an excuse, Tian Dan and Li Yuan made a huge disruption to the negotiations. These two people in cahoots are more dangerous than Qin as far as we from the Three-States Ally are concerned. Guo Zhong and I heavily suspect them to mastermind the assassination on Lord Longyang and you. Not satisfied with only his death, they wanted to kill you as well."

Xiang Shaolong was blown away. With Zhao Ya's reminder, he wasn't as sure about his initial suspicion that Prince Xinling is the assassin. Although Tian Dan wanted to recruit him, it is just another form of 'killing' him. In times like these, talented people that you cannot recruit are better killed so as to deprive other people of utilising them.

An attendant came to report that Empress Jing is ready to meet him.

With Han Chuang at his side, Xiang Shaolong crossed two stairwells, a huge garden before meeting the First Lady of Zhao in the inner chamber.

After they paid their respects, Empress Jing winked at Han Chuang. He retreated with all the attendants, leaving only the two of them seated and facing each other across a table.

Dressed in a luxurious outfit, the Zhao Queen looked even more elegant and attractive.

Compared to Lady Pingyuan, they have their own strengths and it is hard to distinguish who better.

Flashing her eyes and scrutinizing him, Empress Jing simply said, "Does Mister Dong know why I set up an appointment to see you?"

From her tone, Xiang Shaolong could tell that it was herself and not Han Chuang who wanted him to be the City Commander. Han Chuang is just the messenger. He respectfully bowed, "Marquis has mentioned. I am grateful for your kindness and I will do my utmost best to repay your favour."

Empress Jing seemed to be unmoved by his display of loyalty. She coldly asked, "There are two reasons I chose you. Does Mister wish to know?"

Xiang Shaolong raised his head in surprise; could it be that she was attracted to his masculinity?

Her beautiful eyes looking deeply at him, she slowly said, "The first reason is that Tian Dan looks up to you, so you cannot be incapable."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization. Curious, he asked, "Can I know what the other reason is?"

Empress Jing gave a light sigh, "Because you reminded me of someone else. He is fearless like you. Too bad for the timing and he can never be of use to me."

Xiang Shaolong was stricken. The person she mentioned is naturally himself.

Noticing his silence, she asked, "Doesn't Mister want to know who he is?"

Nodding, Empress Jing is pleased with his thoughtfulness. Her voice switching, she coldly asked, "What is your relationship with Zhao Mu? Why did he try all means to divert his gift of the Tian sisters to you instead?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that this is a crucial moment that he cannot afford to hesitate or give an answer similar to the one he gave to Zhao Ya. He shrugged his shoulders saying, "Since I entered Handan capital, the Marquis of Julu has been showering me with gifts. I do not have the slightest idea of why he is doing that."

Glaring at him briefly, she deeply proclaimed, "From today onwards, you can only be loyal to the King and me, the Queen. Any deviation will result in untold misfortunes; don't say I did not warn you. Based on Mister's intelligence, I need not say more and you should understand what is going on!"

Xiang Shaolong had to admit that she is really clever. This female strategist put herself on the same level as King Xiaocheng. He cannot even tell if her words are real or false.

On one side, she is using Zhao Mu. At the same time, she is guarding against him.

Empress Jing added, "Did Marquis Julu tell you anything that is of special importance?"

Thinking for a while, Xiang Shaolong disclosed, "Marquis Julu is not very fond of Li Yuan and often asked me for suggestions on how to fix him. There are no other special information."

Empress Jing was satisfied and nodded her head. Changing the topic, she asked, "Does Zhao Ya often come to harass you? She is ugly right? What are you always so aloof towards her?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that she is asking these personal issues to test his loyalty. He gave a bored sigh, "I do not like loose women."

Empress Jing laughed, "I love your direct character. But if you want to be the City Commander, you have to stay close to Zhao Ya. Let this be my first order for you."

Xiang Shaolong acted like he was unwilling and apologised, "Please forgive me for being a rough boor but I cannot deliberately cheat on anyone. If Empress sent me out to the battlefield for a fight to my death, I will not have the slightest hesitation."

This is called advancing by retreating. If he forgoes his usual style just for the sake of the City Commander position, it will only cause this poisonous and cold-blooded woman to despise him.

True enough, Empress Jing is not the least offended. She consoled, "I know Mister is not such a person. But a loose woman can tempt men easily. I am not asking you to deceive

her. I just want you to showcase your manly character and treat her like a common courtesan.”

Xiang Shaolong was enjoying her charming attitude. His heart warmed up, he teased, “That is also possible, but knowing myself, all women who have done it with me are all reluctant to leave me.”

Empress Jing was staring hard at him but now she is laughing like a shivering squid. Looking at him meaningfully, she said, “Why do you guys all love to brag about your abilities with women? With all these exaggeration, how can we tell who has the real ability?”

Xiang Shaolong was suspicious and had a dying question. He held his tongue and laughed along, “From your speech, I realised that other men are also exaggerating too.”

Empress Jing turned red-faced, knowing that she slipped. Isn’t this as good as telling others that she had tried many other men before?

Recollecting Cheng Dan who stole his credit, Xiang Shaolong deduced that this ingrate may have been assisted by Empress Jing to reach his current position. By why didn’t she continue to lift him up and serve as the City Commander but chose himself instead? He was enlightened that this ambitious woman must have planted people within and outside the Imperial Court and used them for political manipulation.

Both of them did not say anything for a while and the atmosphere was awkward.

Empress Jing stood up and recovered her impenetrable aura. She coldly concluded, "I'll make a move first! If you tell anyone about this event, I will never let you off!"

Xiang Shaolong was cursing inside but he acted respectfully. He finally sighed with relief after sending her away.

As he was bidding farewell to Han Chuang, Han Chuang put on a big display of friendship and insisted on bringing him to the official brothels one day before releasing him.

Xiang Shaolong was idle and went ahead to visit Ji Yanran. From afar, he witnessed Tian Dan's entourage entering the Liu Residence noisily. He was frightened and returned home first.

Shan Rou and the Tian sisters were absent. After asking, he found out that Shan Rou went out shopping and took both sisters with her. Wu Guo accompanied him to his bedroom and enquired in a low voice, "Le Cheng's head has been sent to the farm. First Master asked Third Master what to do with it."

Xiang Shaolong answered, "Let First Master decide. Wait for a few days until security is not as strict and send the traitor's head back to Xianyang Chancellor Lu. Let him hand it to Empress Ji. Inform them to keep it confidential. Otherwise, everyone will know we killed Le Cheng."

Wu Guo received his order and left.

Xiang Shaolong slept for four hours and rushed towards Liu Residence. Shan Rou and the Tian sisters have yet to return.

The sun is setting in the west and everyone stayed indoors, giving the city a lifeless look.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling emotional. In fact, everything was caused by King Xiaocheng.

But this could also be fate. Otherwise, Xiao Pan will never be the future Qin Shihuang.

Ai!

This could be the Fate that Zou Yan was always talking about.

Arriving at Liu Residence, Ji Yanran has been pining for him. The attendant sent him straight to her loft. Zou Yan was present as well. This meeting of three was a happy occasion.

Ji Yanran prepared a set of exquisite dishes. When the three of them sat down around the table, the beauty poured wine personally for both of them. After toasting each other, she complained, "I only receive your news today. Before, I was thinking of you tirelessly and had a few white hairs."

Zou Yan was humoured, "If your hair is rebelling, I will represent all men and punish you with a cup."

Both persons toasted and drank one cup of wine. After Xiang Shaolong apologised to Ji Yanran, he winked at her. She understood his meaning and discharged her two attendants.

Ji Yanran lowered her voice saying, "It is really done by you. Really great. Over two hundred people dead or injured in such a short span of time. Not only was the City in chaos,

even Tian Dan and Li Yuan were taken aback, confused and suspicious.”

Zou Yan frowned, “This incident also revealed your tracks. When Tian Dan visited Ji Yanran earlier and this issue was brought up, he did mention that Xiang Shaolong could be the real killer.”

Xiang Shaolong was slightly stunned. He knew that he can deceive King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu but he cannot deceive a legendary hero. Fortunately, he still has Teng Yi the trump card that can add doubts to Tian Dan’s hypothesis. He nodded and asked, “What did he ask from you?”

Concerned about his safety, Ji Yanran did not reply and asked in return, “What should we do? What if he really suspects it was Xiang Shaolong?”

Xiang Shaolong laughed, “There is no need to worry. In Handan City, everyone is suspecting one another. Xiaocheng and company suspects it was done by Tian Dan and Zhao Mu. Besides, I have traps that will make my enemies tired and confused with my grass army and trees soldiers.”

Zou Yan was tickled, “Grass army and trees soldiers? This description suits Handan City very well. Ji Yanran and I did analyze Le Cheng’s assassination and thought it cannot be you. First, you have too little men; Second, you will not put the city on alert with this move without capturing Zhao Mu beforehand.”

Filled with concern, Ji Yanran chided, “Shaolong, you are too reckless!”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "I thought over this many times before acting. No one will suspect me because I am heavily injured."

He continued to explain why he must kill Le Cheng and the extra benefits. Adding, "If anyone were to investigate, they will discover that I have only a hundred odd men in my residence and my top expert Long Shan is outside the city. Who will believe I have the ability to do such a thing. The very next morning, this same batch of men left the city back to the farm in one piece. Who could have imagined that they were Le Cheng's assassins?"

Ji Yanran and Zou Yan stared at him with disbelief. It is a miracle to use a hundred to fight two hundred without a single casualty.

Because of this point, even the brilliant Tian Dan should not have suspected it was them.

Ji Yanran was relieved and poured more wine for him, protesting, "You are always performing deeds that no one dares to perform, making me anxious. Ai! The days seem unfulfilling without seeing you every day."

Xiang Shaolong apologised, "But my agenda today in finding you is to ask you to separate yourself from me for a while by leaving for Xianyang first."

Ji Yanran's delicate hand shook and wine splattered on the table. Her face changing colour, she exclaimed, "I reject your proposal. Unless we discuss this properly, I will not accept any reason."

Xiang Shaolong looked pleadingly at Zou Yan but this great philosopher can only give a helpless glance.

After Ji Yanran filled Zou Yan's cup, she sweetly smiled, "Even if you think I am unreasonable, it cannot be helped."

Zou Yan tried to help, "Why did Shaolong want us to head for Xianyang first?"

Ji Yanran picked up a piece of vegetable and placed it in Zou Yan's bowl, stated, "No one else is allowed to bring up this matter anymore."

Xiang Shaolong surrendered, "Fine! Let us give up this idea! Is Talented Lady satisfied?"

Looking at him with strong emotions, her eyes seemed to say "Satisfied!"

Xiang Shaolong and Zou Yan smiled at each other bitterly.

Zou Yan asked, "Handan City is not a good place to stay around for long. Do you have any new plans?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "If I can be promoted to be City Commander, a lot of problems can be solved. If not, we have to use a good scheme to get Zhao Mu to the farm and forcibly capture him back to Xianyang."

Ji Yanran butt in, "Don't even dream that he will have the guts to leave the city. Even if he did, he will be escorted by one or two thousand soldiers. Every step will be well-planned so this is the worst strategy."

Xiang Shaolong icily said, "I am now racing against time. The question is that Zhao is awaiting the arrival of more of my men and livestock which does not exist. So I have to get Zhao Mu to rebel in the shortest time. Once he becomes isolated, he will be an easy prey for me. But the time is still the biggest challenge."

Both persons were worried about him.

Xiang Shaolong remembered Tian Dan's earlier visit and asked again, "What is Tian Dan here for?"

Ji Yanran blushed and replied, "What good can it be? He officially invited me to visit Qi as his guest."

Xiang Shaolong secretly admired Tian Dan's direct actions and asked, "How did Yanran answer him?"

Ji Yanran said, "I told him I needed to consider for a few days as I want to ask your opinion first."

After a moment's thought, Xiang Shaolong surmised, "I guess Lord Longyang is the only person who guessed correctly about our relationship. This is favourable to us. Despite not knowing who his assassin is, we benefitted from this episode and dissolved the threat of his constant scrutiny."

Ji Yanran happily cried, "I don't care. I am going to your place tonight. I have many issues in my heart that I want to share with you!"

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "What issues? Can't you say it here?"

Zou Yan was laughing and suggested, "Shall I absent myself?"

Ji Yanran's face was burning red. She viciously kicked Xiang Shaolong under that table and shyly whined, "Mister Zou is also teasing me."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly realised that the 'issues' are just something she said for Zou Yan's sake. The truth is she can no longer hold back her strong desires and wanted to make out with him.

Checking the time, Xiang Shaolong joked, "I will await Miss Ji's presence tonight. Oh! Do you have any idea when Le Cheng's funeral is?"

Both of them shook their head.

He consolidated his thoughts and asked about Li Yuan.

Ji Yanran informed, "He came to pester me every day. From his words, it seems like he is very close to Guo Zhong. I believe Guo Zhong will marry his daughter to him for sure."

Thinking about Guo Xiu'er future, Xiang Shaolong gave a sigh and bid his farewell before leaving.

There are many things that cannot be rushed. He can only pray to become the City Commander.

CHAPTER 7

A Significant Difference

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG had just stepped into his residence with Wu Guo received him and reported, “Princess Ya is here. I invited her to the east room but she insisted on going into the inner hall. She has a dreadful look on her face!”

Earlier, he had seen Zhao Ya’s carriage and Zhao Da in the driveway. There is also a platoon of Zhao soldiers outside his door. Hearing about Zhao Ya’s dreadful look, he felt uncomfortable and inquired, “Where is Miss Shan and Miss Zhi?”

Wu Guo answered, "They have gone back to visit Uncle Zheng and is not coming back tonight."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "Did they meet each other?"

Wu Guo stated, "Miss Shan received her personally while Miss Zhi hid herself."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved and strode right into the inner hall. Just as he stepped over the door ledge, Zhao Ya who was seated alone at the table lifted her pale face and looked at him.

Xiang Shaolong sat down beside her and asked carefully, "Why is your complexion so pale?"

Zhao Ya icily demanded, "Dong Kuang! Did you really send your men to hold back Xiang Shaolong?"

Xiang Shaolong had a big shock and put on an irritated look before replying, "Why did Princess make such a remark? Do I look like someone who breaks my promises?"

Zhao Ya shot back, "In that case, why did I receive news that Xiang Shaolong was disguised as a travelling merchant and appeared in a village thirty miles east of Handan City? He was even involved in a fight with the local guard."

Xiang Shaolong set his mind at rest. Teng Yi had finally acted. Concerned, he asked, "Did they capture Xiang Shaolong?"

Zhao Ya shook her head, "In the wilderness, no one is his match!"

Xiang Shaolong curiously asked, "In this case, why is your face so deathly pale?"

Zhao Ya was shaken and lowered her head, confessing, "I have no idea too. I think I am afraid that he knows that his tracks are exposed and he may not come to Handan anymore."

Xiang Shaolong understood her dilemma. She wanted him to come but wanted him to stay away at the same time. He lied, "My men detained him last night and warned him in Princess's name. At the end of the day, I still do not comprehend why he wanted to come so close to Handan City. I have just received this news and have yet to inform Princess."

Zhao Ya looked at him suspiciously, "Are you lying to me?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be infuriated and roared, "You just wait here, I will show you the evidence that I am not lying. Then I will chase you out of my residence and never want to set my eyes on you again!"

Before she can say another word, he slipped back to his bedroom and retrieved a flying needle. He fondled the Tian sisters for a moment before heading back to the inner hall and put the flying needle on the table in front of Zhao Ya.

The flying needle shone under the lamp.

Zhao Ya stretched out her finger and stroked the needle, hot tears pouring out from both eyes. She trembled, "Heavens! You really found him. What... What did he say?"

Xiang Shaolong used his sleeve to wipe her tears and lied, "He did not say anything. When we asked him for proof, he picked out this needle from a belt that is filled with flying needles. With that he left us. I did not expect him to stick around; he is really courageous."

Zhao Ya did not have any more doubts left. Gritting her teeth, she spoke softly after some time, "Dong Kuang, can you help Zhao Ya with another favour?"

Xiang Shaolong was piqued, "What favour do you want? Hey! I nearly forgot to chase you out and you still dare to ask for favour..."

Zhao Ya did not even hear his words and begged in a soft voice, "Can you bring me and catch up to him?"

Xiang Shaolong was aghast, "No way!"

In a daze, her body was shivering uncontrollably and she turned around and fell into his arms. With a loud "Hoo!" She began crying her heart out.

Filled with her sweet embrace, Xiang Shaolong was saddened as well and sighed that she should not have betrayed him knowing that this will be the end result.

After crying out all the pain and suffering in her heart, Zhao Ya recomposed herself. Still in his arms, she sobbed silently and the front of Xiang Shaolong's shirt is all drenched. As he is wondering how to end this situation, she calmed down.

After she stopped crying, Zhao Ya sat still and lowered her head while Xiang Shaolong dried her tears.

Xiang Shaolong commented, "Princess must have owed Xiang Shaolong plenty of tears in her last life so she has to return so many tears today."

Zhao Ya forced a smile and shook her head in silence. Her complexion remains abnormal.

Xiang Shaolong noticed her eyes were swollen with all the crying and sighed, "No one else can replace Xiang Shaolong in your heart. Princess need not deceive myself and yourself."

Zhao Ya apologetically reached out and felt his wet shirt. Her pretty eyes flashing of desire, she bit her lips, "I want to try. Dong Kuang. I need a man now. Can you carry Zhao Ya into your bedroom?"

Xiang Shaolong was in a difficult position. If he rejects her again, it would put him as an unreasonable man. At the same time, he did not wish to hurt her fragile heart anymore.

For the sake of the City Commander promotion, he cannot offend her.

After he is done with Zhao Ya and Ji Yanran comes along later, will he still have the energy?

Zhao Ya's face is burning hot and she whined, "What are you hesitating about?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed loudly and lifted her up but his mind is back in the 21st century. Based on his memory, he is trying to recall the dirty films he has seen and wanted to try out

something new and exciting. If he used his usual methods, he may not be able to deceive this experienced woman whom he done with on many occasions.

For an unknown reason, Zhao Ya was trembling with strong emotions. It could be that she is carried but an athletic and well-built man like Xiang Shaolong. Without any foreplay, she is already visibly excited and cannot hold back any longer.

Thinking that there is no way out for him, Xiang Shaolong stepped into his bedroom and placed her on his bed.

Gazing at him, Zhao Ya's face is red like fire and she was panting non-stop. Her unconventional look is the most enthralling.

Xiang Shaolong stood at the bedside and was feeling very inappropriate. In the moment, he cannot understand why as well.

Zhao Ya softly invited, "Why is Mister Dong not joining me"

Xiang Shaolong is having cold feet and purposely brought up, "Did Li Yuan visit Princess recently?"

Zhao Ya did not reply at once and looked at the empty bed space beside her. Upset, Xiang Shaolong forced, "Answer my question first."

Zhao Ya closed her beautiful eyes and whispered, "Nope. I am busy with palace duties and did not meet anyone. There are only two men on my mind. One of them is you, and the other one you know who he is."

Xiang Shaolong sat on the bedside and gritted his teeth, undressing her. He asked in a low voice, "Who is a better lover? Li Yuan or Xiang Shaolong?"

Zhao Ya reopened her eyes and gave a trouble answer, "What a difficult question! Oh..."

Xiang Shaolong had started to fondle her breasts tenderly and whispered, "I wish to know!"

Under his caresses, Zhao Ya was shaking uncontrollably. Fidgeting, she moaned, "No one is as good as Xiang Shaolong. He is the only man who knows how to appreciate women. Ah! Dong Kuang! Please continue your torture!"

With Xiang Shaolong's movements, Zhao Ya is stark naked. She continued to pant and moan under his revenge-filled invasion.

After the heavy petting, he climbed onto her.

Zhao Ya's reactions were close to maniacal. After the session, both parties are dog-tired. Although he is pining for Ji Yanran, he lacked the energy to leave the room. Although this session is two hours long, it is still early and he hoped that she hasn't arrived yet.

Lying on the bed, Zhao Ya is truly a treasure without comparison. She knows how to please men very well. There are prettier girls than her but there are not many who are more wild and wanton than her.

Zhao Ya suddenly entangled herself around him. When Xiang Shaolong was panicking about a second round, the beauty

whispered into his ear, "I am absolutely delighted. Even if I were to die now, I would have no regrets."

Xiang Shaolong had to ask, "Who is better? Xiang Shaolong or me?"

After two fragrant kisses on his face, Zhao Ya gazed deeply into his eyes and corrected, "Are you referring to the previous Xiang Shaolong?"

Xiang Shaolong could feel his entire body turning into winter and every limb was numb. He put up a brave front and asked, "Why did Princess make such a comment?"

Zhao Ya flipped over and pressed her body weight on him. After a few more hot kisses, her warm tears flowed like the fountain and she cried, "Shaolong no need to hide from me anymore. You forgot to apply your fragrance and the herbal smell is gone. When I was leaning in your bosom earlier, I recognize you and therefore ask for your love session to confirm my guess. Ai! Shaolong! You may be the most capable man on earth but how can you hide from me when you are in bed? Heavens! Such a delicate mask that caused me so much agony."

She then tried to grab his mask.

Xiang Shaolong removed his mask before her grab and revealed his real looks. Zhao Ya's pearl-like tears were dripping all over his face. Filled with agony and happiness, she sobbed.

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. He stroked her alluring back for a while and flipped over, pressing Zhao Ya below his own body. Staring deeply into her eyes, he gave a forced smile, "Tian Dan was right. My soft-heartedness is my biggest flaw. Witnessing how pitiful and desperate you are over me; I abandoned all our past hatred. Otherwise, how can you embrace me and find out who is behind the sunglasses?"

Cursing at his stupidity for there are no such thing as sunglasses in this ancient times, he stuttered, "Anyway you found out my true identity."

Under the present circumstances, Zhao Ya is not thinking deeply and delightfully chimed, "Heavens! You have forgiven Ya'er? Shaolong! Please kiss me!"

Even if he did not want to please her, he did not have any other choice. He bent his head and covered her face with kisses.

Zhao Ya passionately reacted. With her adrenaline flowing, she was holding him so tightly that he almost couldn't breathe and they descended into madness.

After a long entanglement, Xiang Shaolong was finally able to rest his mouth.

Flustered and in ecstasy, Zhao Ya panted, "Shaolong! Can you call my name? Ever since Ya'er committed that big and stupid mistake, I have never enjoyed a moment of happiness and seriously depressed."

Wasn't she happy with Qi Yu, Han Chuang and Li Yuan? Xiang Shaolong thought of but just couldn't bear to ask.

Reading his face, Zhao Ya understood what is on his mind and made a solemn vow, "Ya'er knows that she has erred. From tonight onwards, if Zhao Ya betrays Xiang Shaolong in any manner, let me be subjected to the worst forms of torture until my eventual death."

Xiang Shaolong did not know what came over him. He reached to her ear and called, "Ya'er! Ya'er!"

These two words heralded a new storm. When the clouds have dispersed and the rain has stopped, Zhao Ya was lying next to Xiang Shaolong. Twisting her body to face him, she praised, "You are really formidable. With a hundred men, you killed Le Cheng as swiftly as lightning and as quiet as a mute, causing plenty of suspicion."

Xiang Shaolong comfortably stretched his masculine and well defined body. His hand slapped her bum with a loud "Piak!" and started to caress it, asking, "Did you people suspect me?"

Zhao Ya disclosed, "Of course we did! But your men left the city early next morning. All of them were fresh-looking and nobody was injured so that ended our investigations. Ai! Who can beat you?"

She continued in a softly, "Can I beg you for a favour?"

Xiang Shaolong was disturbed and hissed, "Are you trying to cut a deal with me?"

Terrified, Zhao Ya clarified, “No! Ya’er dare not. I am begging you.”

Xiang Shaolong coldly said, “Speak!”

Like a frightened bird, Zhao Ya snuggled closer and buried her face in his broad chest. She whined pitifully, “I beg that you do not use such tones with me. This will cause me to fear that you will abandon me again. When I agreed to help King Xiaocheng against you, I set the condition that you must never be harmed. Otherwise, I will never betray you.”

Xiang Shaolong remained expressionless and state, “You have yet to tell me your favour.”

Suppressing her fear, Zhao Ya gingerly divulged, “Lady Ni’s death is caused by Zhao Mu. King Xiaocheng is guilt-ridden after the incident but there is no point crying over spilt milk. That is why he is now distancing himself from Zhao Mu. When the Wu Family and you left for Qin, he aged ten years in one night. He is tormented with sickness and joint pains. Heaven is punishing him already.”

Xiang Shaolong protested, “He has seemed to forget about his own daughter.”

Zhao Ya was startled, “Can you let him off?”

Xiang Shaolong regained his clear mind and intelligence. He did not want to force Zhao Ya to choose between King Xiaocheng and himself. He sighed, “Fine! Since you pleaded on his behalf. I will not hold anything against him.”

After all, Qin Shihuang will be the one to take care of him.

Zhao Ya was elated, "Shaolong, you are the best! Come, tell me what assistance do you require and I will do my best to help you."

Thinking to himself, Xiang Shaolong concluded that this is a blessing in disguise. With Zhao Ya on his side, anything can be achieved.

Zhao Ya dare not offend Xiang Shaolong agreed to all the missions he gave her.

Xiang Shaolong was pining for Ji Yanran and was about to leave when Zhao Ya happily promised, "Time is of the essence. I will see the King immediately. I will make sure you become the City Commander. The only objection will be from Guo Kai as he has someone else in mind."

Witnessing her devotion, Xiang Shaolong was thrilled and helped her to dress up. After all the tussling did he finally send her out personally.

Watching her entourage leaving, he returned to his residence and Wu Guo welcomed him and announced, "Talented Lady Ji just arrived, Hey! Third Master is truly capable. I will not be able to take it if it was me."

Xiang Shaolong groaned inwardly. How is he to account to Ji Yanran later?

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, it was late in the morning. Shan Rou was the one who woke him up. Totally lethargic, he is aware that if this continues, even an iron man will fall apart.

Full of disdain, Shan Rou pinched his nose scolding, "Look at your deplorable state. You obviously still lacked sleep. Seems like I cannot even leave you alone for one night."

Xiang Shaolong sat up on the bed and hooked his arm around her flexible waist and joked, "If you were here last night, I don't think I can even get up!"

Shan Rou slipped away and stomped her feet, "You did not keep your promise and fooled around with Zhao Ya. I hate you."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and asked, "Wu Guo told you?"

Shan Rou made a face and challenged, "He dares to keep it from me? Zhao Ya came first followed by Ji Yanran. You cannot even take care of your own health."

Xiang Shaolong stood up and began some warm up exercises. "Rou Rou, shall we practise our swords together?" he invited.

Shan Rou has never seen the warm up exercises of the 21st century and was taken aback, "Where did you learn such techniques?"

Xiang Shaolong laughingly pointed to his brain and continued to ask, "Where is your sister?"

Shan Rou replied, "She is back at the martial school. After all, she is one of the instructors."

The Tian sisters entered and chimed, "Master Dong is finally up."

Xiang Shaolong felt ashamed and began washing up. He dragged Shan Rou to the garden to be his practice partner.

“Pi! Pi! Pa! Pa!” they were duelling when Teng Yi’s heroic laughter was heard at the side.

Xiang Shaolong was overwhelmed to see him. Getting Wu Guo to take his place against Shan Rou, he breakfasted with Teng Yi in the main hall and updated him on his recent activities.

When Teng Yi heard how Zhao Ya discovered his identity, he smiled, “I had anticipated such a day to come. Third Brother is soft-hearted and still has old ties to this wanton woman. But this matter only benefits us and gives her the chance to atone for her mistakes. You have better get Zhao Da to spy on her. In case of any deviation, we can still escape.”

Xiang Shaolong was relieved that Teng Yi did not blame him. He suggested, “With Zhao Ya’s assistance, we can do a big job here and disrupt the alliance treaty of the six states. We may even create more trouble for Tian Dan and Li Yuan.”

Teng Yi was astonished, “I thought you looked up to Tian Dan?”

Exposed and embarrassed, Xiang Shaolong planned, “I had suspected the assassin to be Prince Xinling but it seems even more unlikely now. It could well be Tian Dan and Li Yuan’s scheme to break up the Three-State alliance. I will visit Lord Longyang later and test his suspicions. Ai! I trust people too easily and can be confused by them.”

Teng Yi agreed, “This is both your strength and your flaw.”

Wu Guo came in to report that Zhao Ya is here.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi caught each other’s glance and guessed that she is bringing good news.

CHAPTER 8

Ready To Kill

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

SHEDDING her depressed attitude, Zhao Ya looked like a brand new person. She had regained her grace, beauty and energy. She smiled like a blossoming flower and her eyes were shining and attractive. Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were fascinated and stared in disbelief.

Paying her respects from afar, she cooed, "Abundant health to Master Dong and Master Long. Zhao Ya sincerely pays her respects."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were embarrassed by such a greeting. The beauty behaved like nothing has happened between Xiang Shaolong and herself. Charmingly, she sat beside the small table and presented sweetly, "As per Master Dong's command, I am lucky to stay alive. Wonder if I can redeem my sins."

"Please report your accomplishments first and we shall judge them." Xiang Shaolong laughed.

Zhao Ya smiled coquettishly and looked at him enchantingly. She then proudly state, "There are two big accomplishments and two small accomplishments. Let Miss tell you one by one."

Teng Yi was amused and served her tea, guessing, "The first accomplishment should be the creation of Dong City Commander, right? This accomplishment alone is enough to redeem your mistakes."

Zhao Ya batted her eye lashes and praised, "With Brother Long's appreciation, Zhao Ya's worries are gone with the wind!"

Xiang Shaolong is full of happiness. Forgiveness is better than hatred and it serves more meaning and joy to life. Comparing the new Zhao Ya to the old is like comparing heaven and hell. He chuckled, "Quickly report the rest of the accomplishments and see how much grace you deserve from me."

Zhao Ya's face is shining with delight and she gushed, "I have persuaded King Xiaocheng to recall Li Mu back to Handan

City and combine forces against the traitor Zhao Mu. Does this count as a big accomplishment?”

Teng Yi banged the table and lowered his voice, “In this case, everything is set. I will be surprised if Zhao Mu does not rebel at once.”

Xiang Shaolong reached out and grabbed his hand tightly.

When Zhao Ya added her hand to join the two united hands, Xiang Shaolong laughed, “Such an accomplishment is enough for me to have amnesia and forget about Ya’er’s previous affairs.”

“Ah!” Zhao Ya cried. Shy but happy, she shot him a look.

After the hands are withdrawn, Zhao Ya continued, “That woman (Empress Jing) really recommended Master Dong to King Xiaocheng. When the King came to ask my opinion, I kept praising your abilities and scored another goal.”

Teng Yi and Shaolong stared at her in astonishment.

Like a carefree bird, Zhao Ya proudly detailed, “I told the King – If the Dong Horse Fanatic is the City Commander, he is still considered neutral. Zhao Mu will surely tempt him to his side. That Dong Horse Fanatic can pretend to ally with him and be our spy in Zhao Mu’s camp. We can investigate Zhao Mu through him and may gather evidence of his rebellion. When Li Mu is back, we can get rid of the traitor once and for all.”

Both men were overjoyed and praised her to the skies.

This opportunity is unbelievable. With this, they can execute all their plans.

Zhao Ya seriously said, "Thanks for your praises, Master Xiang and Master Long."

Teng Yi interrupted, "Have you forgotten I am Teng Yi? You can call me Second Brother!"

Zhao Ya is at the peak of Mount Happiness and sweetly greeted Teng Yi, "Second Brother!"

Xiang Shaolong warned, "Ya'er, if you carry on with your mood, it is as good as writing on your face that Xiang Shaolong is back."

Zhao Ya adorably glanced at him and reassured, "Master Dong need not worry. Princess knows what to do."

Teng Yi abruptly howled, "Why didn't sister come and join us?"

Xiang Shaolong knew that she is eavesdropping. Zhao Ya was startled and look towards the back corridor.

Shan Rou was dressed in a luxurious long dress and swayed out in the most gorgeous manner. Her petite face remains tense and does not seemed happy about Xiang Shaolong's renewed ties with Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya became awkward.

Shan Rou was expressionless but she showed her authority by sitting right beside Xiang Shaolong.

Teng Yi quickly winked at Xiang Shaolong. Shaolong is well-prepared and smiled at Zhao Ya, "With Ya'er's great plan, if we do find evidence of Zhao Mu and Tian Dan's conspiracy, does Ya'er think King Xiaocheng would dare to go against Tian Dan?"

Shan Rou let out a small cry and became more focused and looked at Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya herself is considered quite a beauty as well. Except for her weak spot for Xiang Shaolong, she doesn't give a damn about anyone else, including Shan Rou. She purposely delayed, "We shall see what happens then. If the plot is successful, all the impossible might become possible."

Shan Rou is now on the losing end. She pinched vigorously Xiang Shaolong under the table and wanted him to intercede for her.

Teng Yi spoke up first, "Qi is stronger than Zhao. In addition, Tian Dan did not come alone on this trip. Over ten thousand elite Qi soldiers are camping outside the City wall. I think King Xiaocheng can only swallow his pride."

Zhao Ya explained, "Qi's current success is brought about by Tian Dan. If this man is gone, Qi will no longer be a threat to us. However, the ten thousand soldiers led by the famous general Dan Chu will not be easy to handle. Tian Dan is also escorted by a troop of the finest soldiers. Even if you attack him personally, it will still be an uphill task."

Shan Rou coldly snorted, "We can create a new strategy and force him back to Qi. When he retreats, we will have an opportunity."

Xiang Shaolong prioritised, "This matter still requires some planning. First, we must gather evidence of Tian Dan's and Zhao Mu's conspiracy. The rest can wait."

Shan Rou was ecstatic, "Make sure you keep your promise!"

Xiang Shaolong chided, "You better be more respectful of Princess Ya so that she will help you in return."

Zhao Ya took the chance and said, "Master Dong is wrong. Madam Dong has been very respectful."

Shan Rou was embarrassed and submissively agreed.

Xiang Shaolong was reminded of Le Cheng and asked about his funeral.

Teng Yi suddenly asked, "Is the Lu Gong secret manual in the hands of Guo Zhong?"

Zhao Ya protested, "Of course not! The manual is in my palace residence. Xiao Zhao and the rest are working hard to duplicate a copy. Once done, they will give the copy to Guo Zhong. But it all depends. If Guo Zhong seeks to leave Zhao, not only will he not get the manual, he will also not have a burial place."

Xiang Shaolong then realised why Xiao Zhao and her lovely friends are not around. He guessed that Li Yuan's courtship of Zhao Ya is not to take revenge on him but for the manual.

He blamed himself for not being sharp enough to notice this earlier. To Zhao Ya, he warned, "You must take more precautions. Tian Dan and Li Yuan would love to get their hands on the manual. Even Prince Xinling may have sent someone here to get the manual too. He hates you to the core. Oh! I better send some men to protect you."

Shan Rou volunteered, "Let us sisters take up this job!"

Shaolong was annoyed, "You only want a chance to assassinate Tian Dan!"

Shan Rou angrily retorted, "Am I such a narrow-minded person? You ingrate!"

When all three of them looked at her with suspicion, she cutely shrugged her shoulders and surrendered, "It is fine if no one believes me."

Xiang Shaolong stood up, "Before I become the City Commander, let me seek out Lord Longyang and see what he thinks. Ai! It will be unbecoming if I have recovered but did not visited him."

Shan Rou coldly laughed, "Do not let him bewitch you."

Xiang Shaolong coughed and stared at her with irritation.

Shan Rou covered her mouth and laughed in secret while Zhao Ya stood up as well and invited, "Ya'er is leaving too. Let me give you a lift!"

Lord Longyang was seated at a corner of the living room. The seat is covered with thick fur and propped up with a soft

pillow. An exquisite embroidered blanket covering both his legs, Lord Longyang's pale complexion greeted Xiang Shaolong as he was led in by an attendant. He softly greeted, "Forgive Lord for not paying my respects. Brother Dong is most courteous to come and visit me. Please come and sit beside me."

Xiang Shaolong looked at his four males attendants and was curious about their delicate bodies, clear complexions and a powdery smell.

Lord Longyang understood and apologised, "Brother Dong need not be puzzled. They are all great beauties dressed up as men!"

Xiang Shaolong was amazed. Does Lord Longyang like women too? This will be a thousand year old tabloid article.

After he was seated and had a drink of tea, the four cross dressers and ten over bodyguards left the room.

Lord Longyang looked deeply into Xiang Shaolong's eyes. His own eyes full of gratitude, he softly thanked, "Brother Dong saved my life. What can I do to repay you?"

Xiang Shaolong wanted to say that the only way to thank me is not to get fresh with me anymore. Instead, he said, "I am only doing my best for a friend. It is nothing much. Is Lord getting better?"

Cold rays flashed from the eyes of Lord Longyang as he hissed, "They will have to try harder to kill me."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice and directly asked, "Who could be the mastermind? A gentleman will revenge his sufferings. I will never let my enemies off."

Lord Longyang closed his eyes and kept quiet.

Xiang Shaolong was bothered, "Is Lord keeping a secret from me? Who is the person who waves us to enter the gorge?"

Lord Longyang opened his eyes and plainly said, "He is named Xia Yue. He has been located by Zhao soldiers. Too bad his throat has been slit and he cannot say anything anymore."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken, "Devious indeed. Killing the witness and eliminating the evidence."

Lord Longyang smiled coldly, "Killing him brings no benefit. He was originally from Qi and has been with me for only two years. I appreciate his swordsmanship and thought he was honest and reliable. To think that he turned out to be Tian Dan's spy."

Xiang Shaolong was stricken, "Tian Dan is really the mastermind."

Lord Longyang confessed, "I have long been puzzled at Tian Dan's coming to Handan. Now I finally know. He has no intention in the alliance at all. Now that Qin is having an internal strife, he wants to destroy our Three State Alliance. He harbours ill intentions against Zhao. With Li Mu at the border and Lian Po battling Yan, he took this chance to plot against Zhao. His huge army may have secretly entered Zhao

and assumed different identities and are in hiding. Once activated, they will assist in conquering Zhao from within."

Xiang Shaolong has never regarded Tian Dan's problem to be so serious. He had a rude shock and cried, "Has Lord informed Zhao King of this theory?"

Lord Longyang shook his head, "This is such a big issue and I do not have any evidence; how can I say it out? After I recover, I am returning straight to Daliang and escape all the adversities. If Brother Dong wants to leave with me, I will see to it."

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "Lord intends to watch Zhao swallowed up by Tian Dan?"

A cold smile appearing on his face, Lord Longyang calmly replied, "It won't be so easy. Brother Dong has yet to reply me."

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "I appreciate Lord's kindness but my men and livestock are on the way here. How can I leave like that? After all, I am of Zhao origin and will fight Tian Dan if needed. I must avenge my injuries."

Lord Longyang sighed and slowly explained, "Tian Dan is the most powerful person now and your King cannot do anything to him. After Xiang Shaolong left, there are only thirty thousand soldiers left in Handan City. Most of them are old or weak. Li Mu and Lian Po are too far away to lend any assistance. If Brother Dong wishes to escape this calamity, the only way is to leave for Daliang. Unless you

surrender to Tian Dan immediately, he will never let you off. This man is more vicious than anyone I have seen.”

Xiang Shaolong is frightened by his words, knowing that he had underestimated Tian Dan. Luckily, he still has Zhao Mu’s support or he will die without knowing why. He stood up and wished, “Lord, please have a good rest!”

Lord Longyang knew he remained unconvinced. He sighed and closed his eyes in silence.

Standing quietly for a few seconds, Xiang Shaolong bid farewell and left.

Sunlight was everywhere but Xiang Shaolong felt like he is soaking in ice water.

The streets were as quiet as a graveyard but he could sense danger everywhere and feared an ambush.

After talking to Lord Longyang, his narrow view widened a lot and he starts to think about many things that he has never thought of before. Covering all the possibilities, he managed to paint a complete picture.

Tian Dan is filled with wild ambition and has an accurate picture of the warring landscape. While it is possible, he plans to swallow Zhao first.

After the collapse of the Wu fortress, the Handan army suffered deaths and heavy injuries. There are no strong men to fill up the deficiencies and can only depend on weak and old women.

The Zhao army has two big pillars. However, Lian Po is battling Yan while Li Mu is fighting the Xiong Nu at the border. Both are unable to extricate themselves from the battlefield. The capital is leaderless. Using the excuse to discuss the alliance, Tian Dan brought over ten thousand soldiers as an escort but they can threaten the survival of Zhao anytime.

Of course! This army of ten thousand may not be enough to conquer Zhao. Lord Longyang's speculation of a huge army ambushed with Handan City is unbelievable as it will arouse suspicion. Lord Longyang has this theory because he does not know the relationship between Tian Dan and Zhao Mu.

Through Zhao Mu, he can manipulate the Zhao politics.

Once King Xiaocheng is dead, Empress Jing will be named as the culprit. Using devious methods, Lian Po and Li Mu can be dealt with.

With the two generals gone, Zhao will belong to Tian Dan.

The assassination of Lord Longyang is due to foreign relations.

The other five states will not sit by and watch Qi expand its territory and conquer Zhao. So Tian Dan needs their support.

Yan and Han can be ignored. Yan is busy fighting Zhao and Han is too weak to fight. In fact, Han has lost every battle it fought.

Only the remaining Wei and Chu are still a force to reckon with.

Wei and Zhao are heavily interdependent and Wei will not allow Qi to overrun Zhao land.

Chu is a different matter. Wei remains a great obstacle north of Chu. Without taking down Wei, the army of Chu will find it challenging to conquer China. Tian Dan must have enticed Li Yuan to attack Wei together and split the state between both Qi and Chu.

That is the reason why Lord Longyang is assassinated. It will be Li Yuan's idea to push the blame to Xiang Shaolong.

Due to a stroke of good luck, he disrupted their plans and spoiled their calculations.

Le Cheng's killing has worsened the situation for Tian Dan. A fool proof plan was given the death sentence. Ultimately, Tian Dan do has reservations about attacking Zhao openly. Wei and Han, the other two states of the Three State Alliance will definitely step in.

Now, he can only control Zhao via Zhao Mu and get rid of the two legendary generals. There are no other viable plans.

In such times, if Xiang Shaolong can ascend to become the City Commander, he will be in the centre of all the conflicts and influences.

After hearing his analysis, Teng Yi shook his head and sighed, "This kind of false alliance only serves to cause one's depression."

Xiang Shaolong commented, "We are here in Handan for revenge only. But if this carries on, whether for ourselves or

for work, we must try to destroy Tian Dan's and Li Yuan's conspiracy. No wonder Zhao Mu is confident of controlling Empress Jing. He has the solid backing of Tian Dan."

After further discussions, Xiang Shaolong head back to his room for a nap. At evening time, Zhao King sent someone to invite him into the palace. Xiang Shaolong was thrilled and set off at once.

This round, Zhao King received him in the inner hall. Empress Jing, Zhao Ya, Guo Kai and Cheng Dan were all present. After paying his respects, King Xiaocheng got him to sit at the best seat, followed by Guo Kai and Cheng Dan.

Empress Jing and Zhao Ya sat beyond the tables. Both women have a look of disillusion. It appears that he will not be promoted as the City Commander.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling nervous. King Xiaocheng asked about his injuries as an ice-breaker and he answered duly. Of course, he replied that he has fully recovered.

King Xiaocheng look slightly suspicious asked in a deep voice, "Your swordsmanship is incredible and you are good at deploying soldiers. Looking at your troops, we see evidence of your prowess. Have you thought of serving the military? If you accumulate military contributions, you can be promoted to be a Marquis in the near future, Regarding the farm, you can delegate it to your men. Subject Dong only needs to focus on the big picture and not fret about the other small issues."

Through the corner of his eye, he could see that Guo Kai and Cheng Dan have a jubilant look on their face. He knows that he has lost the promotion.

But why then did King Xiaocheng hint at another important post for him? His mind turned very fast and he thought of the problem and also knew why the two ladies are frowning.

Cheng Dan is the problem.

Both are important military positions but to Xiang Shaolong, they are as different as black and white.

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. If King Xiaocheng announced his decision, the matter will be fixed and no one can change the decision in a short while.

Although Cheng Dan was promoted due to Empress Jing's backing, he seemed to be allying himself with Guo Kai now and broke free of Empress Jing's control. No wonder Empress Jing changed her stand to support him now.

Before anyone could react, Xiang Shaolong thankfully said, "Many thanks for the King's generosity and opportunities. Even if I have to work myself to death, I must do my best to repay Your Majesty. I have some words that I am normally afraid to say but I will report them to Your Majesty now."

From his surprising confession, even Empress Jing and Zhao Ya were taken aback. They wonder what he has to say at the risk of his life.

King Xiaocheng was moved, "Subject Dong, feel free to say whatever you want. I will not blame you."

Xiang Shaolong seriously said, "I have abandoned everything I have to return to my home state to build a farm. I did this because I am a descendant of Zhao and to also fulfil my father's dying wish to return to my roots. As long as Your Majesty has an order, I will execute it without hesitation and without complain."

King Xiaocheng kept nodding his head in appreciation.

Xiang Shaolong vehemently revealed, "But after my observation of the recent developments in Zhao, I feel that we are in mortal danger and can face annihilation anytime."

The colour changed in everyone's face. Guo Kai frowned, "Is Mister Dong exaggerating?"

As King Xiaocheng's top advisor, if he failed to detect what Xiang Shaolong has seen, he would have failed in his job and is obviously upset.

King Xiaocheng encouraged, "Subject Dong, say what you want bravely and do not have any reservations."

Xiang Shaolong simply requested, "Can Your Majesty request the attendants to take their leave?"

King Xiaocheng gave an order and everyone left, including the guards. The hall is only left with the six of them.

Zhao Ya was totally intoxicated. She simply adores this heroic air of Xiang Shaolong.

Empress Jing's eyes are flashing with excitement, improving her opinion of him. She silently praised herself for choosing the right man.

Guo Kai's and Cheng Dan's face turned unnatural, disbelieving the possibility of any earth-shattering news.

Xiang Shaolong continued in a deep voice, "The distribution of power is for all to see. Qin is having an internal strife and every state can finally take a break and focus their energy in expanding their territory in order to unite the world. Today, the power-holders of all states are gathered in Zhao. On the surface, they are here to work together but on the contrary, they are scheming against one another. This kind of plotting is a hundred times more vicious than fighting on the battlefield."

Cheng Dan laughed coldly, "Aren't you being too negative?"

King Xiaocheng furrowed his brows and added, "The alliance discussion is not proceeding smoothly but it doesn't seem as bad as it sounds."

Empress Jing and Zhao Ya did not know what to add so they maintained their silence.

Xiang Shaolong burst out laughing and explained, "Only Zhao, Han and Wei are sincerely working to an alliance. Qi and Chu are not sharing borders with Qin and are not worried."

Guo Kai insisted, "Even if Qi and Chu bore evil motives, Zhao has just beaten Yan and our prestige is sky high. Wei

and Han will not sit by and watch Qi and Chu attack us. Moreover, Qi and Chu are ultimately concerned about Qin and what can they use to conquer us?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Of course they will use schemes to conquer us. The first example will be Lord Longyang. If he had not survived the assassination, the key suspect will be Prince Xinling. Even if Anli (Wei King) does not blame him, the imbalance of power will cause infighting in Wei. Then, Wei will not have the resources to deal with other states. Qi and Chu will benefit the most as the Three State Alliance will be destroyed."

King Xiaocheng was agitated. He had suspected the assassins to be Tian Dan or Li Yuan but had stopped his speculation. He did not articulate the matter as clearly as or was as confident as Xiang Shaolong.

Cheng Dan interrupted, "Mister Dong had better watch his words. If this was leaked out, it will cause uproar."

Zhao Ya coldly shot, "Who will leak this out?"

Cheng Dan shut up.

King Xiaocheng stared at Cheng Dan discontentedly. He asked with suspicion, "Does Subject Dong have any evidence?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Earlier, I was right beside Lord Longyang and understood the whole circumstances from him. Lord Longyang has a personal escort named Xia Yue. Lord Longyang told me that Xia Yue is from Qi and has been

serving him for less than two years. After the attack, he was found with his throat slit. Why did the mastermind want him dead? It is to prevent him from exposing the mastermind. If he is Prince Xinling's man, he can easily escape back to Wei. The mastermind can also kill him in Wei. Killing him at all costs can only tell us that the mastermind is still in our State of Zhao."

Guo Kai and Cheng Dan do not know how to rebut him. After the attack, the assassins have carted away all their injured men, leaving all the Wei corpses. Lord Longyang had not told them about Xia Yue so they did not know one of the corpse belonged to the traitor.

After some time, Guo Kai asked, "Why did Lord Longyang share this secret only with Mister Dong?"

Xiang Shaolong simply said, "I had saved his life and he had wanted me to join him in Wei so he was the most honest with me."

King Xiaocheng's complexion is as dreadful as can be. He cursed fiercely, "Well done, Tian Dan and Li Yuan!" and he coldly added, "Subject Dong must never forget that the people of Chu can never be trusted."

Xiang Shaolong continued, "The second case is about general Le Cheng's assassination. General Le is the centre of influence of Handan's army. With his death, if there wasn't a promising replacement, the army will begin to destabilise. All Tian Dan or Li Yuan has to do is to collaborate with a few ambitious generals and they can manipulate our military.

Our two famed generals Li Mu and Lian Po are situated far from Handan. By the time they are back, they will be too weak to put up a good defence. That is all I have to say.”

Everyone is thinking about Tian Dan’s ten thousand strong army camped outside the city. If there is any internal chaos in Handan, this Qi army is sufficient to influence the any developments.

If he did not conspire with Zhao Mu, the Qi soldiers are not to be feared but the situation is different now.

Guo Kai and Cheng Dan remained dumbfounded. Like Xiang Shaolong before, they can see the danger but did not foresee the potential annihilation of Zhao.

Paled with fear, King Xiaocheng asked, “Does Subject Dong have any plan to reverse this dangerous scenario?”

Using his advancing but retreating strategy, he answered, “I am only a martial arts practitioner and do not have any brilliant strategy. This kind of big issues had better be handled by Chief Advisor Guo and General Cheng.”

Guo Kai and Cheng Dan were very awkward. In such a short time, what can they offer to resolve this complex and intertwined circumstances?

King Xiaocheng was disgruntled, “Can’t someone give me a good idea?”

Guo Kai helplessly coughed, “The best way is to end this quickly. We will secretly capture and kill all the suspicious

traitors and remove the thorn in the flesh. Even if Tian Dan and Li Yuan have a scheme, they cannot do anything... ..”

Empress Jing interrupted, “Wouldn’t that cause an immediate rebellion? After the Wu Family incident, we cannot afford any more upheavals.”

Cheng Dan volunteered, “Leave this matter to me. I guarantee that I will destroy all the traitors as fast as lightning and as quiet as a dumbbell.”

Unconvinced, King Xiaocheng asked, “Does Subject Cheng know who the traitors are? While you are still planning, the traitors may have rebelled already.”

Zhao Ya smiled, “Brother! Now you know that my words make sense! Only if Mister Dong becomes the City Commander, we can execute the ‘scheme within a scheme’ and capture all the rebels in one swoop.”

King Xiaocheng decided, “Subject Dong, receive your order. From this moment, you are Handan’s City Commander. During the morning court tomorrow, I will officially issue you the military seal. Do not disappoint me.”

Xiang Shaolong acted surprised before bowing with thanks.

Empress Jing and Zhao Ya were over the moon. Guo Kai and Cheng Dan exchanged looks of viciousness, seeming to have a plot to get rid of him.

All these cannot escape the sharp eyes of Xiang Shaolong. He laughed to himself. No matter how crafty they are, they will

never guess that he and Zhao Mu share a special relationship.

Ha!

Now, he can openly conspire with Zhao Mu.

This is truly a miracle.

Xiang Shaolong requested King Xiaocheng that Teng Yi be made an assistant general before he left the palace.

CHAPTER 9

Lucky Encounters

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AFTER hearing the entire story from Xiang Shaolong, Zhao Mu stood up happily and faced the sky laughing, "Heaven is really on my side. If I ever be the King of Zhao, you will be my Supreme Commander."

Xiang Shaolong was amused, "Time is of the essence. Let us plan against King Xiaocheng immediately. If Li Mu were to really return, the tide will turn against us."

After a moment's reflection, Zhao Mu asked, "Zhao Ya has succumbed to you but why if Empress Jing helping you as

well. She is in cahoots with Cheng Dan and there is no reason she will help an outsider like you.”

Xiang Shaolong then mentioned the part about Han Chuang and was bowled with laughter. With all his worries gone, he sat down again and said, “I must disclose our relationship to Tian Dan and regain his confidence.”

Xiang Shaolong’s face changed colour, “You must never do that. Unless you reveal your own true identity, he will not believe you with his intelligence. Why don’t I pretend to defect and he may even withdraw his soldiers? It is better to reveal our intentions later and take some precautions against him.”

Zhao Mu nodded in agreement, “You have thought through every detail. Li Mu will not be able to return so quickly. We still have some time.”

Xiang Shaolong added, “Marquis had better gave me some names so that I can answer to the muddle-headed king and gain more of his trust.”

Zhao Mu smiled, “So what if he knows all my spies? But let me consider this first. Once we have our strategies in place, we can then push forward. We can fake King Xiaocheng assassination by Xiang Shaolong. Once I control the military, Empress Jing will have to cooperate with me. Li Mu and Lian Po will also see the end of their career. Hai! It is better that Le Cheng is dead for I have some suspicions of his loyalty.”

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity and asked, “What is the relationship between Tian Dan and Li Yuan?”

Zhao Mu brushed, "I see that they are just using each other!"

Xiang Shaolong can tell that Tian Dan is hiding some information from Zhao Mu regarding this issue and did not press further. He proposed, "Before I am officially promoted, I must try to meet up with Tian Dan and gain his trust. Does Marquis have any pointers?"

Zhao Mu was pleased and clapped, "I am fully confident in your abilities. Do as you wish. Let me plan a few scenarios and I will discuss the grand plan with you."

He added, "Tian Dan will be attending Guo Zhong's banquet this evening. See if you can catch him on the road."

Xiang Shaolong thought of a preposterous idea and departed with glee.

Xiang Shaolong is in his best mood. He slipped to Ji Yanran's loft and shared all the news with her. After a quick session, he intercepted Tian Dan's entourage and entered his carriage.

Tian Dan is indeed a cautious person. The Liu Zhongxia and Liu Zhongshi brothers are still protecting him in his carriage.

Xiang Shaolong went straight to the point, "I have thought over carefully and decided to serve Chancellor with all my heart."

Tian Dan is overjoyed and asked, "I thought Brother Dong needs a few days to consider? Why have you made such a quick decision?"

Xiang Shaolong seriously said, "I have just met King Xiaocheng and he wishes to make me the new City Commander despite all odds. This has forced my hand. I will slip away tonight and send someone to divert my incoming family and livestock to Qi to show my loyalty to Chancellor."

Even the brilliant Tian Dan was stunned was a while before he recomposed his and cried, "Is Handan so lacking in talent that King Xiaocheng has to choose such an unqualified person as you? I do not believe that King Xiaocheng has such an open mind and foresight."

Xiang Shaolong explained, "It is due to my good relationship with Princess Ya. She knows that I am still dissatisfied with King Xiaocheng and used this promotion to make me stay and accompany her."

While he spoke, he scrutinised Tian Dan's expression closely. When Tian Dan heard about his proximity to Zhao Ya, his eyes lit up. Xiang Shaolong deduced that Tian Dan might use his connection to Zhao Ya to steal the secret manual.

Tian Dan stretched out his strong hand and held Xiang Shaolong's shoulder. In a serious manner, he dissuade, "Brother Dong, you must never leave like that. If you stay behind as the City Commander, you will lend me an even bigger helping hand, do you understand?"

Xiang Shaolong pretending to protest, "But..."

Tian Dan heavily emphasized, "From today onwards, Dong Kuang is Tian Dan's good brother and we will share wealth

and woe. Do not worry and become the City Commander. I will come and discuss matters with you after two days.”

Xiang Shaolong gave up. In these times, everyone he spoke to are blatantly lying with their eyes with open. On one hand, Tian Dan tried to take his life. With his value going up, he addresses him as brother. If not for his special identity, he will die without knowing why.

The entourage is nearing the hilly roads besides Guo residence. Xiang Shaolong bid farewell and headed back to his residence.

Before daybreak, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were in the palace attending morning court.

In front of all the officials, King Xiaocheng officially appointed Xiang Shaolong as the City Commander and Teng Yi as his Assistant General. He was given the official seal, official sword, and letter of appointment as well as other stuff.

Guo Kai knew that the decision is final and dare not say anything in retaliation. Zhao Mu’s lackeys, Empress Jing and Zhao Ya cheered with delight. An impossible appointment has now become reality.

After the court session, everyone came up to congratulate them and pave way for future collaborations, making both of them sigh with negativity.

King Xiaocheng personally accompanied Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi to inspect the City Army, letting the soldiers know who their new Commander is and gaining their obedience.

King Xiaocheng proceeded to discuss with both of them the art of defending the city, Teng Yi took the chance to display his talent while Xiang Shaolong depended on his 21st century experience coupled with Mohist Founder Mo Yi's art of war. King Xiaocheng could finally rest on his laurels and celebrate his excellent choice of men.

The accompanying military leaders were all stunned into silence. From what the two men casually said, most of the strategies are something that they have never heard of. Initially unconvinced, they were finally won over by Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi.

After the discussion, King Xiaocheng returned to the palace while another Assistant General Zhao Mingxiong escorted both of them back to the East Gate Army Command Centre. North of the Command Centre's Great Hall, there is a raised armchair that is meant for the City Commander. When Xiang Shaolong took his seat there, over a hundred colonels, majors, captains and lieutenants lined up neatly on two sides and knelt in respect. Xiang Shaolong felt like he was dreaming and cannot believe what is happening before his eyes.

In the following days, both men are busy deploying the soldiers, improving their weapons and training new recruits. The elite soldiers are inserted into the City army and served

as their personal escorts. At the same time, he located Pu Bu and four of his buddies within the City guards and promote them with some other soldiers to the rank of major so as to make it easier to deploy his troops in the future.

When all is done, Xiang Shaolong was relieved and went to visit Zhao Mu.

The traitor met him in the secret room. Zhao Mu sat down and laughed, "General Dong, can you guess what Guo Kai did to topple you? That ungrateful bastard sent me a secret note that you are a pawn of King Xiaocheng who is out to catch traitors like me. He asks me to guard against you and I nearly died laughing."

Xiang Shaolong was infuriated. Guo Kai this lowly scum is willing to forgo the big picture and harm him for his personal gain. Such a cunning man! Xiang Shaolong coldly asked, "Can we do anything to bring him down?"

Zhao Mu advised, "We must tolerate little nonsense like this and focus on the grand scheme. When Zhao is ours, I will destroy his family and subject him to all forms of torture. Let him enjoy his temporary freedom."

Xiang Shaolong reported what had been discussed between Tian Dan and himself.

Zhao Mu praised, "You are a genius. No wonder Tian Dan is so enthusiastic lately. He kept visiting me to discuss plans to control the Zhao politics. Everything is ready but we still lack the chance to assassinate King Xiaocheng. Ai! I am getting impatient."

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "This matter cannot be rushed. I am still fresh in my appointment and have yet to fully control the army. Every day, my influence grows. The most crucial issue now is to gain King Xiaocheng's trust by producing some results."

Zhao Mu waved, "That is easy. We just leak some of our plans to King Xiaocheng and he will treat you like his most treasured object."

After further talks, Zhao Mu came up with a bunch of names. Most of them are situated outside the City of Handan.

Xiang Shaolong could tell from Zhao Mu's flickering eyes that these men are innocent. Zhao Mu is using his hand to harm them. Cursing, he frowned, "How come there is no one within the City?"

Zhao Mu hesitated before he added the names of two petty officials any another four military leaders. The four military leaders are guarding the Great Wall outside Handan. Wa Che of Ci District, whom Xiang Shaolong had met on his trip to Daliang, is also on the list.

Xiang Shaolong is even more certain that this traitor is using this excuse to get rid of his enemies. Withholding this discovery, he nodded, "Marquis must have some spies in the palace. It is better to divulge a few and gain the trust of King Xiaocheng."

Zhao Mu happily added another two names; one of them is Zha Yuanyu who is Xiang Shaolong's camp officer on his Daliang trip.

Xiang Shaolong was amused that Zhao Mu was taking advantage of his ignorance about Handan. In fact, he is more familiar with Zha Yuanyu than Zhao Mu ever will be. He teased Zhao Mu, "Oh! Betraying our own people might not be appropriate. Why don't we skip this list and find some other innocent people as scapegoats and affect our enemies' morale."

Zhao Mu's face changed colour. He can only keep his deceit to himself. If he did not change his list, then he will be openly lying to his 'confidante.' He frantically argued, "Let's see what happens in the next few days! If you have so much intelligence in such a short time, it will seem suspicious."

Xiang Shaolong laughed secretly and agreed, "I will obey all Marquis's instructions. When Marquis feels that the time is right, just send me the list!"

Zhao Mu sighed with relief. He appreciated that Xiang Shaolong is still as obedient despite his promotion and suggested, "I heard that you have promoted some men. I have a few men too that you can promote as well so that they can help you control the security."

Xiang Shaolong could tell that Zhao Mu is increasing his trust for him that he shared his spies' details with him. He patted his own chest and swore, "You can count on me. I will insert these people into important positions tomorrow."

Zhao Mu is glad and revealed the names of four colonels.

In the chain of command, the highest post is naturally the City Commander General. Under him will be two Assistant

Generals, eight Colonels and twenty Majors. All of them have the authority to lead the soldiers.

The City Army is divided into ten battalions. Each battalion has its own captains, lieutenants, warrant officers, sergeants and corporals.

A corporal is the lowest rank and he takes charge of a group of five soldiers, including himself. The next higher rank will be the sergeant and he takes charge of fifty soldiers.

The major will take charge of ten thousand soldiers and his own military leaders.

The colonel is ranked even higher and has the authority to lead the entire army into battle. There are some differences between the colonels like there are strong armies and weak armies. If Xiang Shaolong inserts the four colonels into positions of power, it is as good as letting Zhao Mu control the City Army.

Xiang Shaolong has a plan to counter this and is unafraid of such an arrangement.

Xiang Shaolong knows that Zhao Mu will never fully disclose his entire list of spies. A bright idea came to his mind and he asked, "The human mind is difficult to fathom. Does Marquis have any method to guarantee that they will not shy away and do their best for Marquis in times of urgent need?"

Zhao Mu smiled bitterly, "No one can guarantee that!"

Xiang Shaolong thought of contracts and suggested, "I have an idea which is called the loyalty letter. Marquis can get

your spies to write a loyalty letter, swear on it and hand the letter for your safe-keeping. If you are in trouble and the letters end up with King Xiaocheng, they will be in trouble as well. Therefore, they will do their best and rebel with Marquis.”

Zhao Mu cannot tell that this is a trick and clapped, “Great idea! With these, our rebellion will surely be successful!”

Xiang Shaolong naturally started, “The first loyalty letter will be from me. This is to show my gratitude and loyalty to Marquis.”

Zhao Mu is so happy that he could hug Xiang Shaolong and kissed him. He got his attendant to fetch some brushes, ink and paper.

Except for his signature, Xiang Shaolong’s handwriting is unintelligible. But he had come so far and could only grit his teeth and wrote ‘Dong Kuang is loyal to Zhao Mu’ messily.

Zhao Mu does not hold it against him for he is a ‘tribesman’ after all.

Both men are now as close as brothers and there are no secrets between them.

Leaving the Marquis Residence, Xiang Shaolong hurried into the palace to see King Xiaocheng. When Xiang Shaolong said he has a secret message, he was summoned to the royal study.

This is the first time he was alone with King Xiaocheng and he knows that he has gained his full trust. He respectfully

said, "General has successfully entered Zhao Mu's circle of trust."

King Xiaocheng was surprised, "How did Zhao Mu trust you so easily?"

Xiang Shaolong answered, "We have been on good terms all along. The other reason is I wrote him a loyalty letter."

He started to explain the whole situation and added, "Once we get hold of the loyalty letters, we will be very clear of who the traitors are and will not kill anyone wrongfully."

King Xiaocheng was elated, "General Dong is brilliant to come up with such a plan. I can finally abandon my worries. When the time is ripe, General Dong must help me to raid his house and find the loyalty letters. We shall see who dares to rebel."

Xiang Shaolong advised, "That is not the best move as it will stir infighting. Besides, Tian Dan is still waiting for opportunities to make his move. Let me get my hands on these letters and investigate first. When we have eliminated the palace traitors and prevent any infighting, we will then focus on the military traitors. Till then, even if Zhao Mu has three heads and six arms, he will still bow beneath our forces."

King Xiaocheng could not stop nodding his head, "General shall see to it! Everything is at your disposal."

Xiang Shaolong continued to give his report on his 'defect' to Tian Dan. King Xiaocheng was furious and cursed, "Thanks to your testing, this scum is indeed after our land."

Xiang Shaolong held more talks with him before bidding farewell

He had just left the study when a palace maid intercepted him on Empress Jing's orders.

He had known about King Xiaocheng's issue and that he does not care much for Empress Jing. But he had no idea that she was so brave to waylay him right after his meeting with King Xiaocheng. Helpless, he followed the palace maid into the inner palace.

Exactly like the last time, all the female attendants he met en route were all looking at him seductively.

These days, he has to attend morning court before the sun is up. Busy with his duties, he has no time to visit Zhao Ya or Ji Yanran. Back home, all the ladies are fast asleep. Even the Tian sisters who insist on waiting till he came home were asked to sleep first for Xiang Shaolong could not bear to see them losing sleep over him.

He has more time today and wanted to visit Talented Lady Ji or Zhao Ya. Unluckily, Empress Jing acted first and he was upset but powerless at the same time.

Until now, he does not have a clear picture of Zhao Mu's and Empress Jing's relationship. This will be a good chance to find out!

The palace maid brought him straight to a short tower in the east garden. The palace guards paid their respects to him and made him feel absolutely glorious and prestigious.

Another two palace maids opened the tower doors and winked at him smiling, "Empress is waiting for General on the second floor."

Before he could react, the two girls are kneeling on the floor and helping him to remove his shoes.

Xiang Shaolong had a wild thought – you only live once. Since he came to this ancient time, if he could do it with a queen, it will be quite an accomplishment.

Thinking of her rejection the last time and her beautiful posture, his heart is now on fire.

He still has certain reservations. If King Xiaocheng found out about this, how will he deal with him?

In a dilemma, he climbed up the stairs.

Every step is as heavy as a ton.

Empress Jing is dressed in a luxurious robe and was sitting alone beside a long table. Seeing his appearance at the top of the steps, she cooed, "General is here. Please sit beside me."

Xiang Shaolong pulled up his socks and sat on the other side of the long table. He sighed, "What orders does Empress have for me?"

Empress Jing batted her extended eye lashes and slowly said, "Has General Dong just seen the King? Ai! Your King has been suffering from health problems recently and he refused to get enough rest. I am really afraid that he may fall sick and can never get up anymore."

Xiang Shaolong's desires disappeared at once, having tasted her cruelty once more.

She sounds like she is concerned about King Xiaocheng but is secretly wishing for his end. Once the Crown Prince ascends the throne, a young chap around the age of Xiao Pan will simply listen to her command. At that point in time, she will own Xiang Shaolong. If he is smart, he will continue to do her bidding.

In a few words, she has spelt out the penalties and incentives clearly, adding a touch of intimacy and seduction, making it hard for anyone to reject her.

Before he could reply, Empress Jing clapped her hand once. Two palace girls came up the stairs and laid a jug of warm white wine as well as wine cups on the table between them and left.

Empress Jing personally poured two full cups of wine. Her fingers looked like they have never done any manual work before and her nails were painted in red. She handed one cup to Xiang Shaolong and raised her own cup. Facing Xiang Shaolong, she respectfully wished, "Congratulations on your glorious promotion to become our City Commander!"

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly added, "Thanks for Empress's support!"

"Dang!"

The two cups collided in mid air. Covering her face with her sleeve, Empress Jing drank the wine in one shot. Within a short while, her cheeks turned rosy, adding to her attractiveness.

Xiang Shaolong swore, "Dong Kuang will never forget your kindness, please rest assured."

Empress Jing shot a charming look at him and softly said, "I know you are not an ungrateful man. Ya! Your performance the other day was simply exciting. I am more and more confident in you. Hey! Look at yourself! Why are you so uneasy? Are you afraid that King Xiaocheng will find out about our meeting?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed and frankly explained, "I am grateful for your trust but this meeting does seemed inappropriate. If the King misunderstands Empress, even my death will not be sufficient to redeem my sin."

Empress Jing was tickled, "You speak very tactfully, unlike your usual self. I was the one who summoned you but you speak as if you initiate this meeting. Rest easy! The king does not bother about my affairs. He will not be upset with you. Does this make you feel better?"

Xiang Shaolong is more and more confused about the abnormal state palace affairs. He was trying to get more

news about Zhao Mu and her when Empress Jing suspiciously asked him, “Did Zhao Mu ever mention about me in front of you?”

Xiang Shaolong honestly said, “Forgive my bluntness. Although Zhao Mu has never said anything directly, he has hinted that Empress Jing is in his side. Naturally, I did not report this to the King. Empress can rest easy.”

Empress Jing’s eyes were flashing viciously. She bit her teeth cursing, “So what if he knows? It is entirely his fault.”

From this, Xiang Shaolong knows that it has to do with the sex games between King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu. Even Empress Jing is part of their games. King Xiaocheng is truly an immoral pervert.

Empress Jing slowly sighed, “We are lucky for your reminder. Zhao Mu is an idiot to keep a dangerous animal at home. He even dares to provoke the ambitious Tian Dan.”

Xiang Shaolong wanted to jump for joy. This is called thinking too much. From this new information, he guessed that Empress Jing did want to conspire with Zhao Mu. With the introduction of Tian Dan, she beat a hasty retreat.

The relationship between these people fluctuates with their rise and fall in fortunes. If Zhao Mu really sits on the throne, Empress Jing may just leap into his arms.

Empress Jing batted her eye at him and frowned, “Why are you so quiet!”

Xiang Shaolong could tell that she voice is becoming more and more intimate. He was shaken and feigned, "I was thinking of what I can do next to make you happy regardless of the difficulty involved."

Empress Jing was laughing uncontrollably for a while. She then seductively gazed at him and softly said, "You are delicate despite your rough behaviour and know how to make women happy. No wonder the horny Zhao Ya was intoxicated by you and throw Qi Yu, Han Chuang and Li Yuan out of her residence. Her spirits at an all time high, she has even forgotten about Xiang Shaolong. I would love to have that experience as well. Fine! I know that you are occupied and will not waste any of your time."

Xiang Shaolong was enchanted by her words and was thinking that he can taste the flavour of the high and mighty Zhao Queen. At the height of his emotions, she asked him to leave. He knows that the Empress is playing a game of 'acting welcome but actually rejecting'. Hardening his heart with hatred, he bide his farewell helplessly.

Exiting the palace, he was tempted to visit Xiao Zhao and the rest. Suppressing this unwise decision, he head back to the Command Centre.

CHAPTER 10

Guo's Wedding Feast

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BACK at the East Gate Army Command Centre, it is evening time and Teng Yi just came back from training the soldiers. They gathered in a study room that is filled with bamboo books and began talking.

Teng Yi gave him a general report of the City defences and ended, "Handan's available soldiers are actually twenty thousand only. The rest are old, weak, female or untrained recruits. If activated, they will only obstruct the rest and ruin the morale."

Xiang Shaolong advised, "Quality is more important than quantity. Second brother please assign the new soldiers and the weak and old to the camps outside the city. Let them undergo training or engage in preventive work."

Teng Yi reminded, "For this deployment, your army seal is insufficient. We need to get the other half of the seal from King Xiaocheng."

Xiang Shaolong reassured, "You can count on me."

He continued to relate the issue of Zhao Mu's four colonels.

Teng Yi understood at once and laughed, "Got it! I will promote them based on their abilities and give them a non-existent workload."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "I am lucky to have your assistance. Otherwise, these complex issues will drive me crazy. How in the world did Le Cheng indulge in courtesans every night and hide so many women?"

Teng Yi answered, "Easy. Delegate all the complex issues to Assistant General Zhao Mingxiong but all the credit goes to him instead. Zhao Mingxiong is a talent. He was sidelined as he was recommended by Lian Po. I heard that Le Cheng had wanted to demote him on many occasions but they were all overturned by your Ya'er personal intervention to King Xiaocheng. To think that Ya'er commands such influence over King Xiaocheng."

After a moment of reflection, Xiang Shaolong asked about the Qi soldiers camping outside the city walls.

Teng Yi replied, "I have sent men to erect sentry towers at the four corners of the Qi camp and keep them under day and night observation. On the surface, there is nothing going on, even normal training. I suspect that they are digging tunnels and they are very discreet so we cannot detect anything. I have sent Little Jun to spy on them and we should have news soon."

"Oh!" Teng Yi exclaimed, "I nearly forgot. Lord Longyang has sent someone to look for you and invited you to make a trip to his place. Guo Zhong is throwing a huge feast at his residence tonight. Not only are you invited, even I am included."

Xiang Shaolong exchanged a look with him and they both shook their heads and sighed.

Teng Yi decided, "I won't be going and will manage the fort here. Handan looks peaceful on the outside but it is full of killing aura. Any negligence and it will be too late for regrets."

Xiang Shaolong mused, "It's all yours! Ai! What in the world are we doing, helping the Zhao solve their problems?"

Teng Yi stood up with him, "King Xiaocheng is giving Zhao Mu to you as a present, Third Brother must repay his kindness. Make a trip home first! I hardly see you talking to Shan Rou and the rest."

Xiang Shaolong left with a reluctant smile.

With Wu Guo leading his entourage out of the Command Centre, he ran into Tian Dan's entourage. Xiang Shaolong naturally knew that Tian Dan is coming specially for him and entered his carriage.

The Liu Brothers are seated behind Tian Dan while Xiang Shaolong is seated beside him. This Qi leader smiled, "Brother Dong is an excellent City Commander. The whole situation looks powerful and refreshing."

After apologising, he added, "To gain the trust of King Xiaocheng, I have sent someone to monitor your entourage. Please forgive me."

Tian Dan joyfully patted his shoulder, "I am not an unreasonable man."

Continuing in a low voice, "Have you found out who killed Le Cheng?"

Xiang Shaolong nearly fell apart and hurriedly replied, "If I am not mistaken, it is done by Xiang Shaolong. A few days later, he was detected at a village near Handan City."

Tian Dan mysteriously laughed at his words and plainly state, "This must be Xiang Shaolong's doing. No one else hated Le Cheng as much as he. In fact, Le Cheng is the first target. If Zhao Mu is not the next target, then it will be King Xiaocheng himself."

Xiang Shaolong could feel all his bones freezing and was like a fish out of water.

Tian Dan coldly thinks aloud, "If it is done by Xiang Shaolong, this matter will be very interesting. Where is he hiding in Handan? Who is his spy to track Le Cheng's movements so accurately? Can Brother Dong answer these questions?"

Xiang Shaolong answered in a deep voice, "If I am Xiang Shaolong, I will not be so stupid to hide in the City. Regarding the spy, it is a piece of cake. The Wu Family has deep connections here. There will surely be someone who will cooperate with him"

Tian Dan continued smiling, "Why did he alert the city with Le Cheng's killing? "

Xiang Shaolong was startled and cannot comprehend where he is coming from. He frowned, "What does Chancellor Tian thinks?"

Tian Dan stared at the dark street and slowly said one word at a time, "Xiang Shaolong has been back for quite some time already. I can feel it."

Xiang Shaolong had a big fright. He lowered his voice and asked, "Does Chancellor Tian know where he is?"

He vowed that if his cover is blown, he will kill him right away regardless of the consequences.

Tian Dan let out a very long sigh, "Xiang Shaolong is the most extraordinary man I have ever known. King Xiaocheng did not treasure him and missed out a great opportunity to regain the glory of Zhao."

Shaking his head, he sighed again and patted Xiang Shaolong on his shoulder, "Mark my words. There are spies in Le Cheng's personal escort team. Investigate those that did not go along with Le Cheng that fateful night and you will find the spy. Do a good job. If we can really apprehend Xiang Shaolong, we can use him in an exciting negotiation."

Xiang Shaolong was astonished, "What negotiation?"

Tian Dan simply said, "Like exchanging him for Zhao Ya's Lu Gong Secret Manual."

Xiang Shaolong was amazed. This man is too scary for words. If not for his fake identity, he will not be able to play this game with Tian Dan and may even lose everything he has.

At this point, the horse carriage is driving up the hill road leading to the Guo Residence. As the carriage bumped forward, Tian Dan casually asked, "Where did Brother Dong learn his art of city defence?"

Xiang Shaolong had anticipated this question and shrugged his shoulders, "Everything I know is from personal experience. After numerous battles, I know soldiering. After living with horses, I know how to breed them. It is nothing actually."

Tian Dan maintained his silence for a while before inquiring, "Why did Brother Dong look up to me?"

Xiang Shaolong acted like he was full of sincerity and explained, "Horse breeders must first know how to take care of their horses. Please excuse my eccentricity. Comparing

horses to human, among those I have seen, there are none as good as Chancellor's Tian horses."

Tian Dan was laughing so hard he started to cry. He readily accepts his answer and warned, "You have to guard against Li Yuan. He is extremely narrow-minded and hates you to the core. He will not stop until you are dead. Especially after Zhao Ya become intoxicated with you and ruin his chances at Lu Gong's Secret Manual. Remember, he will stop at nothing."

Xiang Shaolong has no more doubts that Tian Dan and Li Yuan are the masterminds behind Lord Longyang's assassination. The Guo Residence came into view. Xiang Shaolong quietly cursed that he cannot even share a proper conversation with Shan Rou and the Tian sisters. He wonders if he will get to see Ji Yanran, Zhao Ya or even Zhao Zhi.

He has lost a lot of excitement in his life.

The Guo Residence is brightly lit and full of guests, adding to the festivities.

Xiang Shaolong slipped out of the carriage before entering the residence separately to avoid being seen with Tian Dan.

When he stepped into the residence after Tian Dan, he could see Guo Zhong giving Tian Dan a warm welcome and is busy introducing him to the other famous Zhao dignitaries, making him the centre of attention.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly happy. He retreated down the road leading to the residence and glided into a big garden in

front of the residence. He breathed deeply and was energised by the refreshing cool air and caught a whiff of fragrance.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and Zhao Ya appeared at his side. Grabbing his arm, she dragged him towards a little pavilion deeper into the picturesque garden. She praised, "Ya'er thought Master Dong will be unavailable. Ai! You are really capable. Only a few days have passed and you have improved the military strength of Handan City. With such good defence, no one will miss Le Cheng."

After crossing two bridges, they came to a pavilion by a pond. The human voice and lights seemed to come from another dimension. They seemed to be in an isolated paradise of their own.

Xiang Shaolong leaned on the stone fence and put his hand around her thin waist and smiled, "I have decided to help your brother (Zhao King) resolve the danger surrounding Handan City. How are you going to thank me?"

Zhao Ya trembled slightly and leaned into his bosom saying, "Ya'er can only get rid of her old ways and become Master Dong's most obedient woman!" In a low voice, she continued, "Can you really forget the past wrongdoings? Ya'er is afraid that King Xiaocheng cannot withstand another blow."

Xiang Shaolong cannot help but to look at her with mistrust. Zhao Ya had a big shock and cried; "You have no confidence in me!"

Xiang Shaolong simply reassure, "Set your mind at ease. I have a great plan and I promise that your brother will never know that Xiang Shaolong has ever been to Handan or has even been the City Commander."

Still upset, Zhao Ya mumbled, "Zhao Ya understands."

Seeing her crestfallen look, Xiang Shaolong took pity on her. Kissing her lips, he smiled, "Do not worry. As long as you do what you promised, how can I not love you?"

Zhao Ya slowly said, "Will you really bring me away?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that she is terrified and may have wild thoughts or worry incessantly. He seriously state, "Why would I have the heart to deceive a poor girl like you who is looking for your drop of honey?"

Zhao Ya's face began to turn red and she stomped her feet and whined, "I am dissatisfied. After you became Dong Kuang, I still gave all my love to you and my body as well and yet you still bullied me."

Xiang Shaolong had a good laugh. Moving his hands lower, he strongly slapped her two firm bums and asked; "Why is Guo Zhong arranging such a huge feast tonight?"

Zhao Ya was surprised, "You are really immersed in your work and have no inkling that Tycoon Guo is marrying his daughter to Li Yuan."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken and enquired, "Guo Zhong is really leaving; will your brother let him off?"

Zhao Ya sighed, "The alliance discussion is on hold because of Yan and King Xiaocheng refused to give in. Guo Zhong is a man who only looks at profits. He will not wait here for the Qin army to conquer the city. With Li Yuan as his son-in-law, what can brother do?"

Xiang Shaolong comment, "If you leave with me too, wouldn't your brother be heart-broken?"

Zhao Ya was in a state of panic and faintly said, "Have I not done my best for him? I did not even hold Sister Ni's death against him and nearly cause the death of my most beloved. Only he owes me; what do I owe him? As a female, what more can I achieve? I know him better than anyone. Don't be too happy with his appreciation. Once the danger is over, he will treat you differently. Lian Po and Li Mu did so much for the state and look at them now. He only cares about himself and my heart for him is dead. Ai! If my brother is dead and that woman becomes the Dowager, her first target will be poor me. How can I not leave?"

Xiang Shaolong concluded, "I am relieved to hear these words from you."

Still unconvinced, Zhao Ya declared, "Still disbelieving? For you, I am willing to die without any regrets."

Before he could reply, Zhao Ya added, "The main banquet will be held in Chu. Guo Zhong will have to preside the dinner at the capital of Chu. You should understand!"

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened and affirmed, "Great move! Come, let's join in the fun!"

He slapped her back, saying, "You go back first or everyone will be jealous of me."

Zhao Ya passionately asked, "Shall I come to your place tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong thought of Shan Rou and frowned, "We shall confirm later! Is Talented Lady Ji coming?"

Zhao Ya proudly said, "She is here long ago and is busy looking for her lover. Luckily Ya'er acted first."

Xiang Shaolong is very entertained and chased her away before entering the building.

The garden is filled with performers to keep the guests occupied. Seeing this new office-bearer, everyone came to welcome him. By the time Xiang Shaolong managed to extricate himself, Han Chuang led him to a corner and praised, "General Dong is a man of talent. I have never seen Sister Jing having such a high opinion of anyone."

Xiang Shaolong humbly replied, "It is all thanks to Marquis's arrangement."

Han Chuang cursed, "Don't worry. I have put in the best word for you in front of Empress. You must guard against Guo Kai the scum. He is currently spreading rumours that you have laid the Queen to get your promotion to City Commander. Hei! This cunning bastard dared to act so recklessly only because he is the lover of King Xiaocheng. I cannot take this lying down."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "What?!"

Han Chuang continued, "No many people knows about this. Outside the palace, probably not even a single person knows. King Xiaocheng cannot do without men. Too bad you are not gay or you can replace him."

Every strand of Xiang Shaolong's hair is standing at its end. He coughed, "Let's stop here."

Han Chuang intimately added, "It is better you love women! The Queen is a rare beauty and if you can make her happy, Zhao will be at your command when the Crown Prince ascends the throne. When that happens, do not forget your old friend Han Chuang."

Xiang Shaolong could tell that Han Chuang wants to control Empress Jing through him. He can also deduce that Empress Jing is not fully obedient towards him. Afraid that he will ask for the Tian sisters, he dragged Han Chuang towards the building and warned as they walked, "Marquis must take precautions. I suspect Qi and Chu are behind Lord Longyang's attack."

Han Chuang turned pale, "What?!"

Xiang Shaolong is confident that Empress Jing does not share all her knowledge with Han Chuang. They ran into another group of guests and Xiang Shaolong took the chance to slip away and strode towards the main banquet hall.

In the centre of the hall, Guo Zhong stood there and welcomed him, "General Dong is newly promoted to be our City Commander and I have yet to send my congratulations."

Xiang Shaolong swept his gaze and did not see his two sons. He guessed that Guo Zhong must have followed Wu Yingyuan's example and sent his sons away first. He shook his hands and politely said, "It should be General congratulating Mister. You have gained such a handsome son-in-law. All the potential father-in-laws in Handan can only stand aside and watch with hatred and jealousy."

Guo Zhong laughed, "Talking with you is always a joyful occasion."

The main hall is now filled with various guests, numbering almost a thousand. Some of the more reclusive powerful families were also present in their best outfits. With the grand attires and fanfare, who could have guessed that Handan is in danger of war?

Xiang Shaolong's sharp eyes caught Li Yuan who is situated at the other side of the main hall. He is cheerfully chatting with Tian Dan, Guo Kai and Cheng Dan.

Empress Jing made her entrance but King Xiaocheng is absent to show his displeasure.

Ji Yanran can also be seen with another group of people. Even the anti-social Zou Yan is here. Yanran is chatting intimately with the just-recovered Lord Longyang. Both of them are old friends and are naturally close.

Zhao Ba and Zhao Zhi are helping to usher in the guests. Zhao Zhi saw Xiang Shaolong and her eyes widened. Abandoning her company of extinguished ladies, she flew over like a bird.

Xiang Shaolong was blaming himself for being muddle-headed and coming without a present so he took the chance to excuse himself and met up with Zhao Zhi.

This unique beauty whined upon contact, "General Dong! Zhi Zhi hasn't seen you for so many days and is suffering in agony! You must accompany me tonight no matter what happens."

Before anything could happen, Lord Longyang appeared out of nowhere between them. With his warm eyes staring deeply into his own eyes, he stretched his hand and held onto Xiang Shaolong's hands tightly and cooed, "Except for Wei King, I have never felt as much gratitude to anyone compared to Brother Dong. No matter what happens, Brother Dong must not forget that there is someone waiting for you in Daliang."

Xiang Shaolong could feel all his goose pimples standing. He was embarrassed and upset but cannot bear to pull his hand away after seeing how emotional and lonely the other party is. Choosing to believe that he is just affectionate towards both sexes, he started to feel better and consoled him by patting in his shoulder and said, "Dong Kuang understands. Please have a safe journey."

As Lord Longyang released his hand, he caught Han Chuang walking over. Afraid that he may ask for the Tian sisters, he begged Lord Longyang, "Lord, please help me detain this man."

Lord Longyang was surprised momentarily and happily intercepted Han Chuang.

With the help of Zou Yan, Ji Yanran managed to extricate herself from a group of admirers and greeted him, "Dong Kuang! You are so busy that you do not have time to visit me?"

Xiang Shaolong wanted to say that he will bed her tonight but he remembered Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi and held back his tongue. To distract her, he asked in a low voice, "What are they here for?"

Ji Yanran was annoyed and drummed, "I had said that they were after the Lu Gong Secret Manual! What else is there? Dong Kuang! Are you ignoring me?"

This time, he is really in trouble. He laughed, "You are not afraid of Mister Zou teasing?"

In his heart he is groaning. Only a few days of rest and he has to manage three sessions tonight?

Ji Yanran looked over at Zou Yan and laughed, "Why are you so formal? He is my godfather! There is no one here and you, Dong the heartless man, need not be so polite."

Xiang Shaolong looked at the sniggering Zou Yan and smiled, "I'll have no reservations then. Tonight, I will dig out my heart for Talented Lady Ji's to see."

Ji Yanran then brightened up.

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity to ask, "What did Miss Ji do that ended the dreams of Li Yuan and make him willing to marry Miss Guo?"

Ji Yanran hissed, "Nothing works. He came to me today and told me that the official wife position is still available but I kicked him out."

Li Yuan looked over to them and his face is full of hatred.

The bell sounded and it is time to start the banquet.

CHAPTER 11

Zhao Palace On Fire

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AS all the guests are swarming in, Xiang Shaolong pondered over Ji Yanran's words. The more he thought, the more uneasy he is and slipped out to find Wu Guo.

Wu Guo happened to be spouting nonsense with a group of guests who have yet to enter the banquet hall. He was startled to see Xiang Shaolong and he embarrassedly came to his side and asked, "Third Master is leaving so soon?"

Xiang Shaolong does not hold it against him and seriously spoke, "Notify Second Master at once. Tell him that Prince

Xinling has sent a team of experts to Handan and could take tonight's chance to steal the Lu Gong Secret Manual"

Wu Guo scratched his head, "The palace guards and the city guards like us do not mix. Unless approved by King Xiaocheng, we will get thrown out."

Xiang Shaolong agreed that this is a problem. He warned, "In this case, get Second Master to send someone to monitor the palace from outside. If there are any suspicious people, he can use this excuse to infiltrate. Oh, if we can only use our elite troops. Pay attention to the secret tunnels entrances. Prince Xinling may even have the map of the secret tunnels or even a spy in the palace."

Wu Guo left with his order.

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh of relief and head back to the banquet.

Before he could take another step, a melodious voice sounded out from his left, "Mister Dong! Please wait."

Xiang Shaolong found the voice familiar and looked towards the source.

Under the company of eight female attendants, Guo Xiu'er was dressed in a flamboyant red cheongsam. Walking along the left stone path, it appears that she is about to take part in the engagement dinner.

Xiang Shaolong halted and unnaturally congratulates her.

Guo Xiu'er returned the favour and discharged the attendants, "I need to have a word with Mister Dong; all of you wait for me at the side."

The attendants were taken by surprise and retreated to a distance.

Guo Xiu'er ran her eyes over Xiang Shaolong. In an unhappy tone, she sighed, "Father's orders cannot be disobeyed. Xiu'er has no choice. Can Mister understand what I mean?"

Xiang Shaolong is stunned by her frankness and was dumbfounded. In such a short time, he does not know how to reply her.

Even if there is no obstacle between them, based on the family rivalry between Wu and Guo, there is no way that he can marry her!

Guo Xiu'er smiled sadly and turned around. When she turned back, there is a jade pendant on her hand. She stepped closer and pressed it into his hand, emotionally saying, "Xiu'er cannot give my body to Mister so I have to replace it with this jade pendant. If you have feelings for me, please wear it and I will die without regrets."

Finishing, she lowered her head and hastily walked towards the main hall while the attendants frantically caught up.

In ecstasy, Xiang Shaolong held the jade pendant tightly. The jade pendant is still warm with her holding.

He opened up his palm and took a closer look.

It is an ancient jade carving of a phoenix. If he had brought back to a 21st Century auction, the proceeds will be able to last his expenditure for a lifetime.

Thinking of this, he scolded himself.

The girl is passionate and innocent but he has such crazy notions.

Shaking his head, he hanged the pendant around his neck before participating in the feast.

The main hall is full of activity. Hundreds of servants are shuttling in and out of the main hall, serving the guests with dishes and wine.

There are four VIP tables facing the main door.

The first table is Guo Zhong and his wife with Li Yuan and Guo Xiu'er. The other three tables are taken by Empress Jing, Tian Dan, Lord Longyang, Han Chuang, Ji Zhong and other people.

The other tables are lined up on the two sides. Each side has three layers of tables and each table seats four people. The centre area is left open for the performances of singers and dancers.

A group of musicians were based on both sides of the main door and were actively playing their instruments. The air is filled with drumming and cheering and everyone is in a celebratory mood.

While everyone is distracted by Guo Xiu'er entry, Xiang Shaolong slipped to the back row of the tables and wondered where he should sit?

The seats are arranged according to status and he cannot just take any empty seat.

Fortunately, the Guo Chief Housekeeper, Gao Bai saw him from afar and rushed forward informing, "Princess Ya has instructed servant that she wants to sit with General. General, please come with me."

Xiang Shaolong panicked. If he is seated with Zhao Mu, Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi have nothing to say. If he sits with Zhao Ya, they will be jealous and throw tantrums at him. There is a price to pay for having multiple lovers.

He ignored this potential problem and accompanied Gao Bai to the VIP tables.

Among the distinguished guests, many of them are viewing this legendary City Commander for the first time and many of them greeted him.

The women are all eyeing his well-build frame and heroic air. Xiang Shaolong was having mixed feelings. He disregarded every stare and blindly followed Gao Bai, walking between the tables and the wall. Gao Bai stopped and bowed, "General, please be seated."

Xiang Shaolong looked carefully and he saw three pairs of beautiful eyes staring straight back at him.

Zhao Ya, Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi are seated on the same table as him. The other table is Zhao Mu, Guo Kai, Cheng Dan and Zou Yan.

Xiang Shaolong was rejuvenated and silently admires Zhao Ya's thoughtfulness. He sat on the far end of the table beside Zhao Zhi. This is a smart move. If he had sat between two girls, the third one will be neglected. This is also to show his respect for the three girls.

Every guy is envious of him to share the table with three ladies while every girl is dying to replace the three girls to get closer to this popular figure.

The drumming stopped suddenly and sounded again. Over a hundred pretty courtesans glide into the main area and began singing and dancing.

Zhao Zhi whispered, "Sister Yanran told me to ask you where you went earlier?"

Xiang Shaolong joked, "Can't I even go to the bathroom?"

Zhao Zhi leaned towards Ji Yanran to pass the answer and whispered back, "Why are you in the bathroom for such a long time?"

Xiang Shaolong could not hold back his laughter and nearly choked on his food. He endured and asked, "When has Zhi Zhi become a messenger? Every business can be big or small. Even the heavenly gods has no control."

Zhao Zhi burst out in laughter too and passed the message after she tried to hold her laughter.

Zhao Ya and Ji Yanran were laughing till their tears came out.

Zhao Zhi cheekily asked again, "Princess saw that you and Guo Xiu'er almost came in at the same time and there is a change in both your expressions. Did you pull a fast one on her and snatched Li Yuan's prize?"

Xiang Shaolong could only acknowledge her sharp observation and denied everything.

The singing and dancing ended and so did their flirting.

Guo Zhong stood up and gave a speech, announcing Guo Xiu'er engagement to Li Yuan. The actual wedding will be held in the Capital of Chu. This is followed by toasting and the hall is filled with happiness.

Xiang Shaolong looks at Guo Xiu'er's complexion carefully and she looks like a woman resigned to her fate. Feelings swell up in him

If he had never entered the picture, Guo Xiu'er will never have that expression for Li Yuan is indeed a dream son-in-law.

No matter how talented he is, he cannot solve her problem for it is fated that they can never be together.

For the power-holders in these warring times, marriage is just a political game. The higher the status of the female, the higher the stakes in politics. Thinking deeply, when Wu Yingyuan married his daughter to him, it is also a strategy to keep his loyalty. It is a coincidence that Wu Tingfang really loved him or it will be just another tragedy.

For Zhao Qian and him to succeed as a couple is another miracle.

Xiang Shaolong became very emotional and drank another two cups and wine.

Zhao Zhi whispered again, "Zhi Zhi wished that she could make mincemeat out of Tian Dan right now but I am willing to wait because I know that Master Dong will get him at the end."

Xiang Shaolong thinks that Zhao Zhi is overestimating him and softly comments, "Isn't it better to think about happy stuff?"

Zhao Zhi thought that he is teasing her and her face became red and she added, "Zhi Zhi will await Master Dong's instructions!"

Xiang Shaolong had a sudden inspiration.

There is a difference between Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu'er. Both of them agree that the man should be the head of the household and should obey his will even at the cost of their own dreams and thinking.

The difference is that Zhao Zhi has more luck than Guo Xiu'er!

In the same light, Ji Yanran and Shan Rou are women who are opposed to the normal treatment of women. Just like Mo Zi's opposition of absolute power in a single person and the unnecessary rituals and ceremonies.

Mo Zi is a male so his teachings are carried forward for years.

No matter how profound are Ji Yanran's philosophies, others will only take note of her beauty.

Simply because of Guo Xiu'er forced marriage to Li Yuan, Xiang Shaolong was thinking about an entire chain of events and is lost in his thoughts. Out of a sudden, a round of fierce footsteps roused him from his semi-consciousness.

The main hall quietened down and every one watched in puzzlement as a group of Zhao soldiers scrambled into the main hall and even knocked down a tray of food and wine in the process. They continue to fill up the centre of the hall and when they identified Xiang Shaolong, they frantically rush to him and under the looks of everyone, reported, "General Dong, the palace is on fire!"

Everyone present was in a state of shock.

The palace fire was soon extinguished but Zhao Ya's chamber is burnt to the ground. There are over thirty charred corpses, including that of Xiao Zhao and over ten palace guards. No one escaped alive and all the bodies have sword scars or arrow scars.

Zhao Ya is crying her eyes out and is supported by two palace maids.

By the time Xiang Shaolong and the rest have checked out the scene, the palace guards have searched the entire palace but cannot find a trace of the enemy. The only discovery is

that a nearby tunnel has been broken into and the four palace guards securing it are strangled to death.

Cheng Dan's expression is even worse than King Xiaocheng's. As the leader of the palace guards, he must take responsibility for this intrusion. He could be stripped of his post or even beheaded as a result.

King Xiaocheng's hands were shaking like a leaf. Under the heavy escort of the palace guardians, he blew his top and harshly scolded, "All of you are idiots, if the attackers are not after the book but after me, won't I be... Humph!"

All the palace guardians were terrified and they all kneeled down in silence.

Xiang Shaolong thought of Xiao Zhao and his heart was bleeding.

Guo Kai and the rest of the officials are lost as they witness the horrific disaster.

Xiang Shaolong is burning with a thirst for revenge. If the enemy just wants the secret manual, he can just grab it and escape. There is no need to take any lives or even set fire. The act of killing Xiao Zhao shows that the attacker is doing this for revenge.

Teng Yi came to Xiang Shaolong's back and gave him small tug to signal that he has something to say.

Xiang Shaolong left the crowd with him and Teng Yi whispered, "We have discovered the hideout of the criminals. They are hiding in Han Chuang's residence."

Xiang Shaolong was blown away. "What!"

He exclaimed. Teng Yi affirmed, "There is no mistake. Jing Jun personally led our elite men and trailed them. They were seen entering Han Chuang's residence and are still under observation. Even with wings, they will not be able to escape."

Thoughts raced through Xiang Shaolong's mind.

He thought of the Three State Alliance plan and the three leaders who pushed for it. Zhao's Lord Pingyuan is dead, leaving Wei's Prince Xinling Wei Wuji and Han Chuang's senior. It cannot be Han Chuang as he is too young and lack foresight.

A clear picture appeared in his brain.

After Lord Pingyuan's death, there is no strong official pushing for this alliance. Wei and Han are still working hard on this dream.

This is the reason why Han Chuang harboured Prince Xinling's men.

If Prince Xinling's men did not kill, Xiang Shaolong may let them off as he does not place any importance on Lu Gong's Secret Manual.

But when this involves the blood debt of Xiao Zhao, even the gods will not be able to stop him.

Out of the blue, King Xiaocheng hollered, "Where is Dong Kuang?!"

Xiang Shaolong told Teng Yi, "Assemble our forces and be ready to move."

He then strode towards King Xiaocheng.

Zhao Mu, Tian Dan, Lord Longyang, Han Chuang, Ji Zhong, Empress Jing and Li Yuan were all present. They were expressionless and wanted to see how King Xiaocheng manages this affair.

Pale-faced, King Xiaocheng stared hard at Xiang Shaolong and roared, "What kind of City Commander are you? You can't even tell that we have enemies entering the city!"

Li Yuan, Guo Kai and Ji Zhong were delighted at his failure. Han Chuang quietly lowered his head as he did not expect Prince Xinling's men to be so cruel and got his buddy Dong Kuang into trouble.

Empress Jing's face is void of colour and supported King Xiaocheng while maintaining her silence.

Xiang Shaolong swept his eyes round the room and gathered everyone's reaction.

He did not kneel down like Cheng Dan and proudly declared, "The murderers have entered the City long ago but only execute their plans tonight."

Han Chuang was frightened and was in a state of panic.

Li Yuan and company looked at him with disdain, meaning that he is running away from responsibility. If the attackers

had come to Handan much earlier, he is not the City Commander yet and so he is not responsible for the slip-up.

King Xiaocheng seemed to have lost his senses and pointed his finger, scolding, "What makes you so sure?"

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand this king better. As calm as still water, he reasoned, "This attack is carried out by people who have spies within the palace. The perpetrators have chosen the best time and acted with the best information. They come and go without leaving trace. Such plans cannot be consolidated on such a short notice. Based on my deductions, they must have been in Handan for some time and only chose to make their move tonight."

King Xiaocheng regained his senses and began to analyse his words.

Tian Dan interrupted, "Why doesn't Your Majesty let General Dong conduct a search for the enemies and atone for his mistakes?"

Lord Longyang seconded his opinion.

Empress Jing whispered a few words into King Xiaocheng's ears.

King Xiaocheng raised his blood-red eyes and glared at Xiang Shaolong, commanding, "I am giving you three day to dig out the culprits."

He faced the kneeling cum trembling Cheng Dan and added, "Lock this clown in the prison first. If we cannot find the

criminals, he shall accompany those who have died in the attack.”

Cheng Dan gave a tragic cry as he is dragged away by a few palace guards.

He turned to Xiang Shaolong again and warmly coughed, “You are not leaving yet?”

Xiang Shaolong looks at everyone and even smiled at the depressed Zhao Mu. He plainly said, “Such a simple matter; three days is too long. Before the sun is up tomorrow, the lost item will be placed on Your Majesty’s desk. Each and every one of the thieves will be captured. Even if they are dead, their heads will be presented. If I fail, Your Majesty need not lift a finger; I will not see the sun tomorrow myself.”

Finished and leaving the entire crowd dumbfounded, he strides in huge steps towards the palace doors.

Han Chuang’s complexion lost all colours of life. As everyone is focusing on the departing Xiang Shaolong, he smoothly sneaked away and chased Xiang Shaolong from another path.

At the big courtyard outside the palace door, Wu Guo and over a hundred elite troops are waiting by their horses.

Xiang Shaolong has a stern look and flew up his horse without a single word.

Han Chuang caught up to him and called for him to wait.

Xiang Shaolong had known that he would chase him and got a horse for him and they rode out of the palace together.

Han Chuang is horrified, "Where is General Dong going to find the attackers?"

Xiang Shaolong eyes were shining and he coldly looks at him, replying, "Of course to your residence. Does Marquis think they will be hiding anywhere else?"

Han Chuang was mortified, "General must be joking!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "I am not joking. I have received your kindness and I know that Marquis did not expect them to kill anyone. The matter can still be salvaged, depending on Marquis's cooperation. Otherwise, I will not take responsibility for the end result. Marquis should know better!"

He squeezed the horse belly and his war horse dashed forward.

Wu Guo and the rest followed his lead. Raising their horse whips, they rode forward at full speed.

Gritting his teeth, Han Chuang pushed his horse to catch up.

Thunderous hoof beats filled the air and shattered the sleep of Handan's citizens.

VOLUME 10

CHAPTER 1

Leave No Witnesses Alive

[Translated by REN WO XING]

XIANG SHAOLONG and his men galloped directly towards Han Chuang's residence. Jing Jun had already led his crack troops to surround the residence, sealing off all the small

alleys and roads nearby. After they arrived, he had made a secret gesture towards Teng Yi, who then led the tens of remaining soldiers to mount, then directly charge towards Han Chuang's residence.

Han Chuang, trying to catch up from behind, had no idea what was going on. Wasn't this a case of 'striking the grass and startling the serpent'? But at this moment, the only thing he cared about was himself. He had no time to worry about anything else, as he whipped his horse onward.

Just as they nearly arrived at the main door of the residence, the residence suddenly was flooded with lantern lights as a large host of Han Chuang's men charged out, putting up a lively display.

Xiang Shaolong glanced backwards, allowing Han Chuang to catch up. In a deep voice, he said, "Marquis, will you cooperate or not?"

At this moment, the flesh on Han Chuang's face was twitching beneath his skin. Violently grinding his teeth, he said, "I will act in accordance with what you say!"

Xiang Shaolong had secretly worried that he wouldn't speak up. Laughing, he said, "I recommend all of your subordinates to come out and whole-heartedly assist us in catching these thieves!"

At this moment, fifty or so horsemen arrived in front of the main gate. Han Chuang shouted to his men, "By my orders, get over here and help the City Guards pursue the thieves!"

His men were flabbergasted, guessing that he must be putting on an act. Assenting aloud in unison, they returned to the manor and called for men to equip their horses.

Xiang Shaolong and his men continued to gallop without pause. After passing a few more streets, he waved towards Han Chuang. "Dismount!"

Before Han Chuang had a clue as to what was going on, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi flew off their still-galloping horses, their movements as graceful as that of a swimming dragon. The soldiers to each side held their horses' reins, and the two horses continued to gallop without stopping. Han Chuang had no choice but to slowly slow his horse down. Only after his horse had slowed down enough was he able to jump down. His horse was led away as well. In his heart, he couldn't help but feel admiration. By acting in such a manner, Xiang Shaolong's brilliance was put on display. If he were Prince Xinling's men, he wouldn't become suspicious either. At the moment, Handan was filled with running soldiers. It'd be strange if his manor was silent.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi darted off to one side. They watched as a group of roughly three hundred horsemen galloped directly towards them. At this point in time, Han Chuang was walking towards them from a few hundred feet away, at the point where he had dismounted.

Xiang Shaolong said, "Order all of your men to come directly towards us and to obey my men's orders!"

Han Chuang was already riding on the tiger's back and had no way to get off. He gestured to his men, ordering them to continue to advance. He only stopped one person, to whom he said a few words. Only then did the rest of his subordinates, bellies filled with questions, continue forward as directed.

When the sound of hoof steps gradually faded away, Xiang Shaolong calmly said, "Marquis, at this moment, the entire district has been surrounded by my men. Nobody can enter or exit these few streets. So long as you, Marquis, are willing to cooperate with us, I am willing to say that the enemies had buried themselves in Lady Ya's courtyard, and were planning to assassinate her, only for us to have flushed them out, chasing them away towards your manor. Marquis, do you think this plan is workable?"

Han Chuang's face was ashen. After a long time, he gloomily replied, "Is it possible for us to leave no witnesses alive? There's around ten or so slave-girls left inside."

Xiang Shaolong said, "Do those slave-girls know the truth?"

Han Chuang shook his head.

Teng Yi understood Xiang Shaolong's feelings. He said, "We need to act in accordance with the demands of the situation. If we start killing people at random, that would actually raise people's suspicions."

Han Chuang slowly calmed down. He knew that for Xiang Shaolong to be willing to protect him despite risking execution proved that he really was a true friend. Aside from

secretly cursing Prince Xinling's men for having revealed their hiding place and ruined their plans, what else could he do? After sighing, he said, "Let's have you make all the decisions in this matter!"

Right at this moment, Jing Jun appeared suddenly from out of nowhere. He excitedly reported, "Everyone is in place!"

Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt a strange sensation. This was like a counter-terrorist operation in the 21st century. These terrorists had occupied a building, and held in their hands a precious manual of weapons diagrams. Their goal was to safely take the manual back home. At this moment, their greatest advantage against these terrorists was that the terrorists had no idea of the danger they were in, and the fact that they had a traitor, Han Chuang, on their side, who intimately knew all of the enemy's details.

Han Chuang asked no further questions. He let out another sigh, then said, "They have thirty five men in total. However, every single one of them is an expert. Their leader is Yue Xing. He is one of Prince Xinling's competent subordinates."

Xiang Shaolong had once shared a seating mat with Yue Xing at a banquet at Daliang, the capital of Wei. He let out a secret sigh as well. After inquiring regarding the enemy's position, he said, "If your men were to enter the granary they are hiding themselves in, is there some secret password that is needed?"

Han Chuang secretly exclaimed to himself that this man is indeed formidable. Nodding, he said, "The password is,

'Many blessings to Master Lu'. Remember, leave no one alive. I will also need to ask that brother Dong put on a play as well, near Lady Ya's residence."

Wu Guo just happened to arrive by their side with several of his best men. Teng Yi pulled him off to one side and instructed him to order a troop of men one street over to go to Zhao Ya's residence.

Xiang Shaolong clapped his hand on Han Chuang's shoulder. He reassured him, "Marquis, be at ease. I, Dong Kuang, have already decided to act in lockstep with you in this matter. Afterwards, all of the corpses will be spread across the courtyard, the walls, and the streets. In addition, after Xiaocheng gets his secret manual back, he's not going to quibble too much over how I returned it!"

Frowning, Han Chuang said, "The most worrisome problem is that your subordinates might let the secret out."

Xiang Shaolong patted his shoulder forcefully, before replying in a relaxed way, "The people I have surrounding this place are local Zhao soldiers, but the people who will be accompanying us on this mission are my clansmen. I knew from the start that this had nothing to do with you, Marquis, and I immediately decided to do my best to help you cover this matter up, no matter what."

Han Chuang knew that Xiang Shaolong really should not have acted in such a way. He gratefully said, "Brother Dong, you really are a true friend!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly berating himself for being so soft-hearted, even towards such bad men as Han Chuang. But without Han Chuang's help, it was likely that the only thing they would be able to retrieve would be the ashes of Lu Gong's secret manual. He replied, "Marquis, please go join up again with your servants and wait for news."

After he was done talking, he started to move towards the residence with Teng Yi and Jing Jun. Han Chuang, under the 'protection' of several of Xiang Shaolong's elite troops, was quickly escorted away.

The civilians nearby had been awakened by the hoof steps long ago. All of them were panicked, but nobody dared to stick their heads out to take a look. Instead, they actually shut their doors and windows, afraid that trouble might make its way to them.

Xiang Shaolong suppressed the grief and hatred he felt for the deaths of Xiao Zhao and the others, returning to his normal calm and cool-headedness as he began to carry out this counter-terrorist operation.

Borrowing the light of the moon, Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, and Jing Jun led around twenty or so crack troopers who were especially talented to flip over the walls with their tools, landing within the wide expanse of the manor's rear garden. They moved as quickly as ghosts, without making any noise.

Everything was quiet, like normal. The only thing which could be heard was the pre-arranged sounds of horses

galloping to and from, which perfectly concealed and drowned out any sounds which they might have made.

There were three storehouses arranged in a neat row in the garden. The one in the middle was their target, the granary. The group quickly moved towards it, locating all of the doors and windows. They took the best hiding spots they could find. Others climbed on top of the roof, preparing to drop in through the windows.

The granary was totally dark inside. It was totally silent.

Next, around fifty crack troops climbed over the walls as well, hiding themselves within the flowers and other plants in the garden. All of them had loaded crossbows in their hands.

Seeing that all the preparations were in order, Xiang Shaolong motioned towards Teng Yi and walked towards the granary door.

The two pulled out their precious swords, arriving in front of the door.

Knock, knock!

The soul-stirring sound of the door being knocked felt especially grating to the ear.

The granary remained silent.

Teng Yi said in a low voice, "Many blessings to Master Lu!"

A few moments later, a deep voice shouted, "What is it? Why have you come to find us now?"

Teng Yi shouted in reply, "Open the door now! The Marquis ordered us to come here and give you a report."

How could the man know that it was all a trick? With a creaking sound, he opened the thick wooden door by just a crack.

Teng Yi shot out a powerful kick. With a miserable cry, the person who opened the door collapsed inwards along with the door.

The wooden door fell.

It was time to make their move.

The crack troops attacked from the eight windows situated around the granary. First, they threw in around twenty or so wind lanterns which they had just lit. These wind lanterns were marvelously designed. Around the size of a soccer ball, the flame was kept within the center. The lantern cloth were perforated with holes and treated with flame-retardant chemicals. Thus, they would not catch flames. They were one of the secret weapon the crack troops used for night assaults.

The small granary, capable of holding only around ten or so large baskets of grain, was immediately filled with light, revealing the positions of each and every one of the thirty or so men within, be they standing or seated.

At one moment, they were in a world of darkness, where they couldn't even see their own fingers; in the next, they were assaulted by brilliant light. There was no way for their

eyes to immediately adjust, rendering them effectively blind. In addition, when hit with such a shocking change, everybody was panicked.

This was precisely one of the best counter-terrorism techniques the 21st century had to offer.

No matter how evil and vile a terrorist might be, in the end, he was still a human. Physiologically, he was no different from any other person.

That was why, out of all the weapons counter-terrorism experts designed to assault the terrorists' senses, Xiang Shaolong was the most proficient and skilled at using cryo beams and nerve grenades.

The former was capable of sending out a beam of cold at a temperature of negative 273 Celsius. At this temperature, absolute zero, all living cells would instantly stop moving. Afterwards, when the enemies were thawed out, they would be totally fine, albeit made prisoners.

Nerve grenades had a very wide radius, and were capable of paralyzing the enemy's nervous system. After the enemy became totally immobile, they were helpless to resist any attacks.

In this age, he obviously did not have access to such awe-inspiring, powerful weapons. But the 'wind lanterns' which Xiang Shaolong came up with, when used in this situation, had much the same effect.

The only difference was in whether or not there would be any left alive.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi had mentally prepared themselves long ago. As soon as the wind lanterns were thrown within the room and illuminated their enemy's bodies, the two dropped to the floor and rolled into the room.

At the same moment, Xiang Shaolong threw out a flying dagger, sending it flying into the neck of the door opener, who had been knocked down on the ground as well, blood flowing from a wound in his head.

Within the still-bright room, they saw that the bloodstained murderers were still in full battle gear, and had not yet relaxed. There were two people guarding the door, one of whom Xiang Shaolong faintly recalled as being Yue Xing.

When Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi jumped up, their longswords forcefully rose up from the ground as well, gutting into these two men's bellies.

Just as Xiang and Teng made their sword strikes, the sound of crossbows being fired could be heard, followed by miserable cries.

Before Yue Xing and the other had even had a chance to draw their blades, they felt an unbearable pain. And then, as blood spurted from their bodies, they stumbled backwards.

The remaining men were all struck by cross bolts and staggered around.

Yue Xing and the other man stumbled back ten or so steps before fell down backwards. Their breathing halted, they died.

Thinking of how Xiao Zhao had been burned to death, how could Xiang Shaolong feel any pity? Charging forwards, he killed two people in a row before realizing that no more enemies remained standing. Jing Jun, who had flipped in through the windows, had killed one more person than he did.

Xiang Shaolong pounced towards Yue Xing's corpse and began to search the body. He found both the original and the copy of Lu Gong's secret manual. A surge of sentiment suddenly swelled within him. If it weren't for these two things, how could Xiao Zhao and the others have lost their lives?

Teng Yi walked towards him. In a low voice, he said, "Are you really going to cover up Han Chuang's role in this?"

Xiang Shaolong let out a sigh. Rising, he said, "Am I too soft-hearted?"

Teng Yi wiped away the fresh blood from his sabre. He dully said, "There's not much time left. Let's hurry up and handle this matter!"

He motioned for the crack troops to move the corpses from inside the courtyard to outside, after finishing off the still-living with a stab, something which Xiang Shaolong himself could not bring himself to do.

King Xiaocheng, seeing Lu Gong's secret manual placed in front of him on the desk, was overjoyed. He didn't really pay too much mind to Xiang Shaolong's description of how he had chased the assassins out of Lady Ya's residence, then surrounded and wiped them out.

Off to one side were Zhao Ya, her beautiful eyes still swollen red, and Empress Jing. Watching, they were both gratified that Xiang Shaolong had become the meritorious hero of the day.

Only Guo Kai's eyes were coldly turning as he said, "How could Comander Dong be so unwise as to not leave a single survivor, who would be able to directly accuse Prince Xinling of his crimes?"

And then he said towards King Xiaocheng, "If we had been able to secure a living witness, we might be able to repair the situation with Wei as well. It looks as though these people also played a role in the attempt to assassinate Lord Longyang."

Hearing his 'new husband's' reminder, King Xiaocheng frowned. He said towards Xiang Shaolong, "Chief Advisor Guo's words are logical. What do you have to say for yourself, Commander Dong?"

Xiang Shaolong calmly replied, "Your humble servant had no other choice. I had to kill them as quickly as possible. Otherwise, when the enemies realized that their situation was hopeless, they would move to destroy the manual. Even

if they only destroyed part of it, it would still be a great loss for us."

Empress Jing spoke in support, "Lord Longyang had already recognized some of the people involved and verified that the leader of the group was Prince Xinling's servant, Yue Xing. All we have to do is deliver these corpses back to Mr. Wuji, and I expect that he will be very frustrated."

King Xiaocheng was primarily interested only in Lu Gong's secret manual. When he thought it over, it made sense. Nodding towards Xiang Shaolong, he joyfully said, "Commander Dong, you have accomplished an extraordinary service. Naturally, we will reward you heavily. Hmm..."

Xiang Shaolong knelt down and thanked him. "Majesty, your generosity shames me. No matter what, your humble servant bears responsibility for having allowed this group of bandits to remain undetected in Handan. Majesty, you are already being very benevolent by not pursuing that further. Your humble servant recommends publicly displaying these corpses for three days, sending a public message of reassurance to the people of the city."

Seeing how humble he was, King Xiaocheng was all the more delighted with him and nodded repeatedly.

Xiang Shaolong seized the opportunity. "To improve the safety of the city, your servant would like to commandeer some additional men to fortify our defenses. I hope that you will allow it, Majesty."

But on such a matter, King Xiaocheng was not careless at all. He said, "Minister, present your defense plans to us for our perusal. If there are no problems with it, I will immediately approve it."

As he spoke, he let out two yawns in succession.

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity to ask for leave to withdraw.

The day was just beginning to brighten.

CHAPTER 2

Complicated Situation

[Translated by SLYPHIAD]

INSIDE the carriage, Zhao Ya curled up inside Xiang Shaolong's embrace, extremely sorrowful over her loss.

Xiang Shaolong rubbed her shoulder and softly whispered, "Keep up your spirit! A dead person can't return back to life. We can only use our grief as strength to embrace all the upcoming dangers."

Zhao Ya twitched, "They all died tragically. We couldn't even recognize their faces. Who would actually dare to

collaborate with these murderers? How did they even know the secret path to the palace?"

Xiang Shaolong's heart trembled in fear. If this problem was investigated properly, even Empress Jing would be implicated in it, but if he didn't explain everything to Zhao Ya clearly, with her wisdom, who knows one day she might realize that he had been lying to her all along. So, he explained Han Chuang's role in this incident.

Zhao Ya was filled with hatred, dissatisfied, "How could you let go of Han Chuang?"

Looking at her filled with hatred and fury, Xiang Shaolong started to have a headache, sighed, "I also have no alternative. This incident must surely involve Empress Jing. In our current circumstances, there can only be danger and no advantage towards Zhao. If the relation between Han and Zhao worsen, it would only provide advantages to Tian Dan and Li Yuan. Ya'er, can you understand my difficulties? Don't forget that I promised you to help your brother to tide over this crisis!"

After this reasoning, it's hard for Zhao Ya to pursue it further, lying back down onto his embrace, she whispered, "Shaolong, I hate my Brother. Besides himself and his personal interest, he doesn't care about anybody else."

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed. At the end of it, everyone who becomes the Emperor will become like this.

Absolute power will corrupt anyone.

When he thought about this, he couldn't help but consider Xiao Pan, the future Qin Shihuang. Just thinking about it brought about intense feeling of dread.

Handan had just passed a quiet but not so quiet morning.

Lord Xinling's underlings had all been executed. Everyone in the city was shaken. This has brought Xiang Shaolong's prestige as the new City Commander to a whole new level of height.

The following few days, Xiang Shaolong and the rest were busy. They have put in place several new preventive measures, but in actual fact, they were secretly preparing a way to capture Zhao Mu back to Xianyang in order to complete this mission.

With Guo Kai persuasion, Cheng Xu was released and allowed to resume his original post. Both were now even more envious of him. At the same time, they were confused why Zhao Mu hadn't done anything even after knowing of Xiang Shaolong's plot.

Because of Lord Xinling's incident, both Tian Dan and Li Yuan tried to keep a low profile, not allowing anyone to guess what they are doing.

Han Chuang tried even harder to avoid suspicions, rarely went out for anything. Even more, he wouldn't dare to request Shaolong to allow Tian Zhen and Tian Feng to accompany him, relieving Xiang Shaolong of this headache.

Lord Longyang decided to return to Daliang. Xiaocheng decided on a day inside the palace to organize a banquet in order to send off Lord Longyang.

On the morning of three days before the farewell banquet, Zhao Mu sent someone looking for Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong knew what it is all about, left whatever he's doing and went to Marquis resident to see Zhao Mu.

This traitor invited him in to the secret room, excitedly said, "Your idea of loyalty letter is amazing. I can immediately test who is loyal towards me and who is sitting in neutral ground undecided."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Quickly give me the names of these undecided people so that I may present them to Xiaocheng to get rid off."

Zhao Mu pulled out a letter from his chest, spread it out on the table, gleefully smiled, "We both are thinking along the same line. Look! I have prepared it already."

Xiang Shaolong looked at it closely and only saw more than ten names written on it. Cheng Xu surprisingly was written amongst them. The rest are all prominent ministers and generals inside the city.

Xiang Shaolong was astonished, "Isn't Cheng Xu Guo Kai's underling? How could he appear on this list? Could it be...?"

Zhao Mu's eyes glinted with wildness briefly, "If it wasn't for me, this ungrateful bastard wouldn't even have the right to

be Palace Commander? You better used this time when Xiaocheng is unhappy with him to get rid off him.”

With these words, Xiang Shaolong instantly understood that Cheng Xu is definitely not his underling. He only wants to borrow someone else’s hand to kill him so that he can get his underling onto Cheng Xu’s current position.

From this conclusion, who would have the biggest opportunity to be the next Palace Commander would probably be Zhao Mu’s man.

Zhao Mu smiled, “Even if we couldn’t harm him, we have nothing to lose!”

Then he went silent, “Xiaocheng truly summoned Li Mu to return to the city. The 20,000 thousands elite soldiers under his command are on the way here. They will arrive in Handan in seven days. Hmph! But his return will only bring about his death because Xiaocheng doesn’t have that many days to live.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly rejoiced. He knew that Zhao Mu had decided on a plan to usurp the throne. Pretending to be excited, “I have also prepared everything. Marquis, when have you decided to act?”

Zhao Mu was shivering in excitement. The poisonous snake-like ugly scar on his face and both his eyes were flashing in excitement. He frostily replied, “Three days later during Lord Longyang’s farewell banquet. Every ministers and generals will all be inside the palace. That would be the perfect time to act.”

This time, even Xiang Shaolong was confused, "But that would be when the security inside the palace would be most tight and the alertness would be most high, where is the opportunity in there?"

Zhao Mu smiled sinisterly, "As long as you can get organise those Generals whom are loyal towards Xiaocheng to move into the palace and replaced them with our people, then the city will fall under my hands. Under those circumstances, would Handan then be like a meat on top of the anvil allowing me free reign to oppress and exploit."

Xiang Shaolong replied in a heavy voice, "Could Marquis explain it better for me?"

Zhao Mu nodded, "Our helping hand is that thief, Xiang Shaolong. I will organize someone to leave a mark that he has arrived inside the city. By that time, even if you don't bring it up, the badly frightened Xiaocheng will force you to track him down. You can use that as an excuse to move about and blockade the palace. On the other side, you can open wide the gate to allow Tian Dan's army to enter the city. By then, who would be afraid of the trivial 10,000 palace guards, even more so when I have my own people inside too?"

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "Isn't this too forceful? It seems like there is slight discrepancy between this and what Marquis had originally planned for?"

Continuing in a soft voice, "Can you really trust the Qi?"

Zhao Mu was slightly displeased, "Regarding this, I have my own consideration. As long as you can attain Handan's military power and follow my instructions, three days later would be Xiaocheng's time to return to heaven. The rest you don't need to worry about. Afterwards, I guarantee that not only you'll become the three army commander in chief, wealth and rank will be yours to enjoy."

Xiang Shaolong knew that the situation won't be as simple as he described but he knew that if he continues to pursue this line of questioning, it will raise his suspicions. After agreeing to his request, he took his leave and immediately headed to request an audience with King Zhao.

Inside the palace, Xiang Shaolong on seeing Xiaocheng, was afraid that there might be spies amongst the palace guards, sent him an eye signal. Xiaocheng agreed and led him to walk through the palace garden with the guards guarding from a distance. After listening to Xiang Shaolong's report, he sighed, "Until today, I just realized the loyalty and importance of both Li Mu and Lian Po towards this Zhao. After eliminating Zhao Mu and his gangs, with Guo Kai and General Dong's help, and also Li Mu and Lian Po, I am confident that we can rebuild our country again. In addition, we also have Lu Gong Secret Manual. Unifying the whole country is just a matter of time. General Dong needs to work hard this time. I definitely wouldn't forget your hardwork."

With a person like Xiaocheng spouting these words is an equivalent of actually confiding in him. If Xiaocheng can truly be what he promised to do then there is a hope to rebuild

the country again. But listening to this heartfelt confession, Xiang Shaolong for whatever reason felt an inauspicious feeling. His heart felt really uncomfortable. Maybe, it's because it doesn't follow Xiaocheng's normal behavior, that's why it gave him an abrupt feeling.

Looking at Xiaocheng's pale face, Xiang Shaolong replied in a heavy voice, "If the city's commander post is vacant, who would you choose as a replacement?"

Xiaocheng couldn't answer right away, frowning, "General Dong, why are you in a rush to know?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "All along, Zhao Mu doesn't fully trust me. He hides many things from me. I saw how confidence he is, so he must have someone who is loyal towards him inside the army. If the city commander's position is empty, this Zhao Mu's underling would have a big probability of being chosen for this role."

Xiaocheng shook his head smiling, "This is only one of Zhao Mu's wishes. In reality, even I myself am not sure who I would have chosen. There are several candidates; I don't believe that all of them are on his side."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken, "If something suddenly happened to the Commander General, under these circumstances, you must have someone in mind to temporarily lead the guards to avoid any chaos. In your heart, who would be the best candidate?"

Under the Zhao's Palace Commander, there are ten Imperial Colonel leading the ten armies. Each army contains roughly

between 1,000-1,500 soldiers. These armies specialize in guarding King Zhao's safety. All of them have been rigorous training and selection process. They are the elite. Their skills are far above the city guards and the outer city soldiers.

Under normal circumstances, if the Palace Commander could not carry out his duties, one of amongst the ten Colonels will carry it out instead, selecting the best of them to temporarily take over, mainly because they are familiar the Palace security and activities so as not to cause any problem.

Xiaocheng deliberated over his choices for a while, sighed, "This problem is hard for me to decide in such a short amount of time."

Xiang Shaolong understood his indecisive personality and continued to ask, "It seems like if we can't obtain those Loyalty Letters, then we can't feel out what Zhao Mu plan is. Let me handle this. Your Majesty, please relax."

Xiaocheng fully trusts him, "Tomorrow, I will give you the other half of the army seal. It will give you the authority to move the armies around."

He paused for awhile then continued, "If Tian Dan also joins in with that traitor that wants to usurp my throne; I want to take advantage of this time to kill him. General Dong, do you have the confidence to do this?"

Xiang Shaolong replied in a heavy tone, "Your Majesty, have you thought of the consequences?"

Xiaocheng sighed, "I have thought over this issue for several days now. The Qi without Tian Dan would be like a tiger without claws and teeth. The problem is this person is not easy to kill. That's why I am asking General Dong's opinion."

Looking at this worried face, Xiang Shaolong gritted his teeth, "Leave this to me! Hey! I have a request if Your Majesty would be so kind to grant it."

Xiaocheng said, "Please continue, General Dong!"

Xiang Shaolong continued, "Regarding handling Zhao Mu, if Your Majesty could keep this a secret between the two of us and not let anyone else knows, including Minister Guo."

Xiaocheng was stunned, displeased, "Does General Dong suspect Minister Guo?"

Xiao Shaolong replied, "As long as we haven't obtained that Loyalty Letters, I couldn't be sure who is in that traitor's pocket. Zhao Mu's men could even be one of Minister Guo's underlings. In this important moment, one mistake would cause everything to fall apart. It's better to be safe than sorry."

Xiaocheng contemplated his words for a while then nodded in agreement. After discussing the details of the operation, Xiang Shaolong left the palace and return to his command center. He sent for Teng Yi and told him of the current situations.

Teng Yi was absorbed momentarily then replied resolutely, "Zhao Mu has started to be more wary of you. Hng! Your

performance was just too amazing, especially after snatching back the Lu Gong Secret Manual. If I was Zhao Mu, I would also be a little bit cautious towards you.”

Xiang Shaolong anxiously said, “Not only Zhao Mu became more wary over this, but my biggest problem is that I had serendipitously become the biggest benefactor of Le Cheng’s death. Even more troublesome is that Guo Kai is plotting something in the background. Now I am at a critical time. Truly bad timing!”

Teng Yi blanked, “What do you mean serendipitously?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly while explaining it to him then said, “Now, we have to find a way to grab those Loyalty Letters before we can understand Zhao Mu’s movements. I reckon this sly as fox old thief would want me to get my hand dirty while he just sits by watching. Ai! I’m gonna talk to Tian Dan.”

Teng Yi said, “You better not do that. It seems like Tian Dan is also suspicious of you. If you go, it would be an equivalent of sending yourself to death. You might even accidentally reveal a weak point. If he asked you about the Lu Gong Secret Manual, how will you answer to him? He is not Xiaocheng. He wouldn’t trust you easily. Furthermore, he must have known the relationship between them and Han Chuang. There’s also Li Yuan. Recently, we might have overlooked him too.”

Xiang Shaolong was disconcerted upon hearing this. While troubling himself over this, his underling came in to report that Lord Longyang is here to see him.

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly, "Now, the only one I can trust is this not man and not woman fellow."

After saying this, he went to the main hall to greet Lord Longyang.

After waving away his people, the two of them sits in the corner and starts chatting softly.

Lord Longyang's spirit had improved a lot, returning almost to his previous condition and gaining back his confidence, watching him closely momentarily, gently said, "This morning, Li Yuan came looking for me. He wants me to join forces with him to force Xiaocheng to withdraw his troops from the Yan. Otherwise Qi and Chu will resort to military forces. Hmph! He is full of himself. After only becoming the country's uncle for a few days, he felt like he is the representative of Chu's Xiao Lie."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "If Qi and Chu combined forces to deal with us, would Wei also come out to help?"

Lord Longyang smiled, "Brother Dong, even though your wisdom is as deep as the sea, but your disposition afterall is forthright and honest. You wouldn't understand someone as treacherous as Li Yuan. What he said and what he does is totally different. He only said that to cover up another bigger treacherous plot. You better warn Xiaocheng to be more

wary of him. Ai! I am really worried about you, Brother Dong!”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Why would you say that, My Lord?”

Lord Longyang sighed, “I knew that you attained this City Commander role primarily due to Empress Jing’s backing. After the fire, I want to warn Brother Dong that this woman is very ambitious. Without making any noise, she can play around with people as easily as if they are on the palm of her hand. It wouldn’t even waste a small breath it takes to blow a speck of dust for her to put you beyond redemption. In the past, when Lord Xinling lives away from home in Handan, they were both involved with each other. You are now useful to her, so of course, she would try her best to win you over. Once you have run out of your usefulness, let’s see how she will treat you then?”

Xiang Shaolong started to cold sweat. He truly didn’t consider Empress Jing as a threat. Now looking back, she really isn’t that simple. At the present struggle, regardless of which side wins, she will reap benefit regardless.

The problem lies with Li Mu and Lian Po. As long as they’re alive, no one would dare to touch her.

Xiang Shaolong considered himself to be in Empress Jing’s shoes. She wished someone could help her to eliminate her King husband in name only but not in reality so that her son could ascend the throne while she controlled everything behind the scenes. At that time, with Li Mu and Lian Po,

these two loyal and famous generals, backing, her standing will be as stable as Mount Taishan.

Suddenly, he understood the significance of his role as the City Commander. Only he could give her power to control Zhao Mu and contend with Qi and Chu, these two foreign forces.

When he thought of this, one soft jade hand covered the back of his hand.

Xiang Shaolong was surprised and looked at Lord Longyang. He only saw him tenderly gazing at him, sincerely said, "Please leave Handan! Otherwise you will die without burial ground. It doesn't matter who ascend the Zhao's throne, at the end of it, they both will want to eliminate you."

Xiang Shaolong endured his almost acceptable hand on his hand, resolutely shook his head, "I never cared about life and death before, especially when we are at the juncture of my country's demise. Even more, I wouldn't avoid and not care about this, otherwise I will regret it for the rest of my life and I would be ashamed to face my father in the afterlife."

Lord Longyang saw that he is determined, retracted his jade hand, took a long sigh in a depressed state, gently said, "Brother Dong truly is a real hero. I won't force you anymore but if one day Brother Dong can't endure this anymore, please remember that I will be waiting for you in Daliang."

Paused for awhile before continuing, "Although Empress Jing and Guo Kai have different opinion on the City Commander

post, but both of them, because of gains and losses issues, will collaborate with each other. You have to be careful of them!”

Xiang Shaolong was astounded. An idea flashed quickly through his mind. At the same time, he berated himself for his oversight for not realizing earlier Empress Jing’s machinations everywhere.

Lord Longyang had nothing left to say and took his leave.

Xiang Shaolong was touched. Full of gratitude, he saw him to the stable outside the command center and sent him off.

He knew in that instant that he needs to start his strategy afresh. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be able to leave Handan alive. Furthermore, he wouldn’t be able to capture Zhao Mu alive.

CHAPTER 3

Appearing To Both Welcome And Spurn

[Translated by REN WO XING]

AFTER sending off Lord Longyang, Xiang Shaolong sent a messenger to secretly summon Pu Bu to inquire regarding Zhao Mu's recent activities.

Pu Bu thought for a while then responded, "Recently, he spends very little time at his estate. The people accompanying him are all trusted bodyguards who have been with him for over ten years."

Xiang Shaolong said, "How are all of your brothers doing?"

Pu Bu excitedly said, "They are extremely excited. They all say that Master Xiang lives up to his words and has not abandoned them. Your ambush and assassination of Le Cheng was all the more exquisite. However, I still do not dare to inform them that Master Dong is really Xiang Shaolong. It's always best to be a cautious."

Seeing how prudent the man was, Xiang Shaolong felt greatly relieved. "Every time Zhao Mu returns to his estate, is there any room in particular he spends most of his time in?"

Pu Bu was slightly stunned. Nodding, he said, "Now that you mention it, Master Dong, I do seem to recall that the past few times he's returned to the estate, he'll always go to the Jade Peach Garden at the eastern side of the residence. He keeps on walking in circles at the Reclining Traveler's Veranda there and also ordered me to send people to guard that place in specific. Five sentry posts were set up. Master Dong, for you to ask such a question, you must know the reason behind his actions."

Xiang Shaolong resolutely said, "Let's see how the situation is tonight!"

Pu Bu let out a sigh. From within his bosom, he withdrew an overhead map of the marquis' estate. "I prepared this map long ago. Every single guard post is marked clearly. This part here is the Jade Peach Garden. The rectangle within the garden is the Reclining Traveler's Veranda. Be sure not to go on the roof; there's a hidden sentry there."

Xiang Shaolong saw how even the hidden sentry was noted down on the map. After analyzing it for a while, he said, "As long as we can breach the outer barrier, we'll have our opportunity. What is this thick line circling around the Reclining Traveler's Veranda?"

Pu Bu said, "That's a man-made creek that also serves as a natural barrier. It definitely isn't easy to get near the Reclining Traveler's Veranda."

He explained in detail again.

Xiang Shaolong, fearing that his long absence might raise other's suspicions, quickly urged him to leave.

After sending off Pu Bu, Xiang Shaolong unceasingly analyzed that map, but before he was able to think of any appropriate way by which he could sneak into the estate without attracting any attention at all, he glided in the straight-tempered Ji Yanran.

When this great beauty saw him, she appeared less joyful than she had in the past. She morosely burrowed into his embrace, saying, "I'm very worried! Although you demonstrated your prowess, you've aroused the suspicions of all parties. The strangest thing of all is, why would you have sent people to secretly watch over Zhao Ya's palace, and why is it that when you pursued Prince Xinling's men, you only used your own subordinates?"

Hearing so many flaws exposed at once, Xiang Shaolong was stunned. "Did you come up with this by yourself, or did you hear it from others?"

Snuggling in his arms, Ji Yanran sorrowfully said, "If I can think of these questions, can it be that others will not? Fortunately, no matter what theories they come up with, they still wouldn't be able to imagine that you are Xiang Shaolong. They only suspect that you, Empress Jing, and Han Chuang have some secret plan and are plotting in secret. Everyone knows that without Han Chuang providing information and a hiding spot, there is no way Yue Xing and his men would have been able to sneak into the Zhao palace to commit murder and arson, much less discover the location of Lu Gong's secret manual!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned speechless. Just as he was secretly berating himself for losing sight of the greater picture, this talented woman continued, "For the sake of ruining my opinions of you, Li Yuan unceasingly badmouths you under the pretext of discussing Zhao politics. He claims that you are one of the instigators of the arson, and that you, Empress Jing, and Zhao Ya have formed an alliance, and that you hope to be promoted into the nobility. It's good that he does so. That's why I still go to his place often to hear the news."

Xiang Shaolong unhappily said, "You still meet with him frequently?"

Ji Yanran coquettishly glanced at him. "Oh! How sweet! Shaolong is sipping from a cup of vinegar [getting jealous]. You oversensitive rascal! I'm suffering all this on your behalf. Li Mu has almost returned. When is Zhao Mu planning to make his move?"

Xiang Shaolong explained Zhao Mu's plans to her.

Ji Yanran's face became dignified and imposing. In a solemn voice, she said, "It seems they aren't even willing to let Han Chuang and Lord Longyang off the hook."

Frowning, Xiang Shaolong said, "You think Zhao Mu would be willing to offend both the countries of Han and Wei under these circumstances?"

Ji Yanran said, "Zhao Mu only needs to find an excuse to force the two to remain in Handan. By the time Han and Wei find out what happened, months would have passed. By that time, they would 'hesitate to smash a rat for fear of breaking the dishes nearby'. If within those first few months, Zhao Mu is able to execute or dismiss Li Mu and Lian Po without bloodshed, and also has both Qi and Chu supporting him, it won't be too hard for him to ascend to the throne!"

Xiang Shaolong hesitated for a long time. After first getting a bit frisky with this beautiful woman, causing her entire face to blush red, he said, "Yanran, will you do as I say?"

Ji Yanran was still 30% clearheaded. She sweetly replied, "As long as you don't intend to force me to leave you, anything is negotiable."

Xiang Shaolong said, "How could I bear to? To the contrary, I intend to fall asleep while holding you each night!"

Ji Yanran doubtingly said, "Don't you need to accompany your other wives?"

Xiang Shaolong knew that he had just exaggerated too much. He tried to play it all the way through, "Can't we just spread a large blanket to cover everybody?"

Ji Yanran glanced at him tenderly, unable to keep from smiling. "Sleeping together under one big blanket? How could you think of such a thing! I'm not as debauched and depraved as you. Oh! What was it exactly that you wanted me to do?"

Growing serious, Xiang Shaolong said, "How many warriors do you have under you? How good are they?"

Ji Yanran said, "My father and I have, all together, around a hundred family warriors. Roughly twenty of them can be considered high-class fighters. There are no questions at all about their loyalty, especially my own personal men. They are all clansmen who fled to Wei with us to avoid disaster. Each of them has their own unique skills. We even have some expert swordsmiths."

Xiang Shaolong remembered that she was a member of the nobility of the country of Yue, the same as Tian Zhen and Tian Feng. He secretly thought that the beauties of Yue really were quite extraordinary. His heart suddenly stirred, he began to attack her with hands and lips, while saying, "Regardless of whether or not we succeed in this venture, we will need to leave Zhao. I want you to come up with an excuse for leaving..."

Ji Yanran's violently trembling face turned white in the blink of an eye. She sat up straight and, ignoring his hands

roaming across her breasts, resolutely said, "No! Even if I am to die, I will die with you. I long ago have had my fill of the pain of being parted."

Xiang Shaolong was greatly moved. In a soft voice, he said, "Your departure will only be a ploy. Now that I am the City Commander, I naturally have the capability of stealthily bringing you back so that you might secretly aid me. The reason I want you to leave is so that you can take away both Zou Yan as well as those two twin serving girls of mine to a safe place. That way, I can scheme without fear."

Ji Yanran's pretty face returned to its original color. Letting out a sigh, she said, "As you wish!"

Then she mumbled, "The best excuse is to return to Wei for a funeral. By chance, I just received a letter informing me that Empress Wei, who has always treated me like her own daughter, has just passed away due to illness. I will use this as an excuse to immediately head back towards Wei two days from now. When I reach the boundaries of Wei, I will alter my path towards Han. But as far as how to secretly enter Qin and then return to Han, you will have to make the arrangements. Oh! I'm so happy! Not only would I be able to stay with you day and night, I'll be able to stay with you at all times as one of your 'soldiers'."

After an ardent kiss, they discussed various stratagems for leaving Zhao before Xiang Shaolong urged her away.

When Teng Yi saw him, he said, "Han Chuang sent someone here to look for you. He says he has urgent business."

Xiang Shaolong secretly pondered how wonderful it would be if he could create multiple copies of himself like Sun Wukong. His heart suddenly stirred, he pulled Teng Yi off to one side. "Tonight, I am going to burglarize Zhao Mu's mansion. At that time, if you dress up as me, then we can keep everything safe and hidden."

Teng Yi frowned. "The oaths of loyalty?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded.

Teng Yi was silent for some time, then said, "In order to defend against the real Xiang Shaolong, Zhao Mu must have prepared tight, cautious rings of defenses. Must you take this risk?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled wryly. "In order to understand Zhao Mu's plot so as to prevent our boat from sinking in the sewer, there's no better alternatives."

Teng Yi sighed along with him. "No one would be a better fit for disguising themselves as you as Wu Guo. That fellow is especially skilled at playing tricks, and is even more skilled at imitating others' voices and intonations. With me helping to conceal any flaws, I guarantee that no one will be able to tell. Hey! Why don't we have young Jing Jun go with you tonight as well?"

Xiang Shaolong said, "I have received information from Pu Bu which thoroughly details Zhao Mu's defenses. The fewer people who know about this matter, the better. Oh well! I will go visit Han Chuang first. We can discuss things more in depth when I return."

When he thought about the placement of guards in the garden, he became all the more cheerless.

Teng Yi, knowing that he had made up his mind, did not speak further.

They arrived at Han Chuang's manor. The marquis' face was somber as he led them into his residence. Only after they arrived at a tightly closed door in an inner room did he speak. "Empress Jing wishes to see you again."

Pushing the door open, he walked in.

The only person within the hall was Empress Jing herself. Her back facing towards them, she was staring outside the only window in the room at the garden below.

The rays of light shining past her from the window made this beautiful married woman appear all the more enchanting and graceful. For a moment, Xiang Shaolong found it difficult to link her to all of her stratagems.

The two gingerly walked behind her.

Empress Jing slowly turned around. First, she smiled slightly towards Xiang Shaolong. But when her gaze fell upon Han Chuang, she said with a cold humph, "If the person handling that affair had been anyone but Minister Dong, you would have exhausted me to death, you rash, impetuous man."

Han Chuang was a person of great personal standing. For Empress Jing to openly rebuke him in such a manner in front of Xiang Shaolong made him feel very awkward. His entire face turned red, but he didn't refute her remarks.

Xiang Shaolong soothingly said, "At least the affair is over with now. Empress Jing, please do not blame the Marquis."

Empress Jing's face was as cold as ice. After staring at Han Chuang for a while, she said, "There are still repercussions to come from this matter. I said long ago that considering the current circumstances, it isn't advisable to have any contact with Prince Xinling. And yet, you refused to listen to me and almost imperiled Minister Dong."

Han Chuang sighed, "Elder sister Jing! How else do you want me to pay for my transgressions before your anger will be appeased? I, too, didn't expect Yue Xing and his men to be so aggressive and cause such trouble."

Empress Jing suddenly laughed. Just as the two were feeling confused, the beautiful married woman said, "The only benefit is that King Xiaocheng now trusts Commander Dong even more, and that.... that slut, Zhao Ya, feels extremely grateful to him as well. Fine! I want to speak with Minister Dong in private."

Han Chuang found it appropriate to leave, closing the door as he departed.

Empress Jing approached Xiang Shaolong. At a hand span away, she halted her footsteps. In a soft voice, she said, "Minister Dong, how should I thank you for performing such a meritorious deed?"

Although he knew very well that she was using her beauty to win him over and that her heart was filled with schemes, when he remembered that she held the lofty position of

Empress of Zhao and saw how sensual and sexy she was, he couldn't help but feel extremely aroused. With a dry throat, he said, "Empress, you showed me great favor by promoting me. Naturally, I will serve you with all my effort and am willing to do anything."

Empress Jing took another step forward, almost touching Xiang Shaolong's bosom. She lifted her face up, eyes sparkling with light, as she said gently, "The people in this day and age all say one thing and do another. People like Minister Dong, who are willing to risk their own lives to carry out their promises to me, make me feel extremely grateful. I will never forget what you have done for me, Han Jing. I guarantee you riches and honor for every day I am in power."

If this were in the past, Xiang Shaolong's trusting nature would have caused him to feel extremely moved. But after having been warned in advance by Lord Longyang, he was vigilant and only dared to tentatively listen to her words. But he allowed a look of gratitude to appear on his face as he said in a soft voice, "I, Dong Kuang, always pay my debts. And this was just a small matter besides..."

Empress Jing moved forward slightly one more time. Her tall, erect, firm breasts pressed firmly against his chest. Her breathing beginning to grow rapid, she said, "Regardless of whether or not I am the empress, I am a woman. I need a man to look after me. You also know the king's ugly secret. He's also agreed not to interfere with my affairs. His health has grown poorer by the day, especially in the past half year.

He's sick and aching all day long. Hypothetically, if the prince, my son, were to become king, we will need outstanding talents like Minister Dong all the more to assist us. Minister Dong, do you understand the hidden meaning of my words?"

Xiang Shaolong could feel the alluring suppleness of her erect breasts. He secretly thought to himself that only a total idiot would not understand her 'hidden meaning'. He intentionally frowned, "Empress Jing, set your mind to rest. I am totally loyal to you. Ah! Empress Jing, please don't act in such a way! I'm almost unable to control myself any longer."

Empress Jing began to laugh, her face appearing like a blooming flower. She placed a soft kiss on his face before retreating to the windowsill. She smiled enchantingly towards him. "Who is telling you to control yourself? If a person cannot act as he desires, what joy is there in life? Unfortunately, right now, I don't have the time to test and see if you were being honest or just boasting when you claimed to be able to make women desire to never leave you. If you have the chance to visit the imperial palace, try and take the time to visit me!"

After she finished speaking, she brushed past him, smiling as she left. Xiang Shaolong was left behind grinding his teeth, secretly hating her for arousing his lust and making him feel uncomfortably aroused. The worst thing was, he really did want to take a taste of this Empress.

When he thought of this, he suddenly remembered the aphrodisiac which Han Chuang had given him for the purpose of seducing Ji Yanran. If he were to use a little of it, it wouldn't be too unfair! Perhaps he could even flip the situation around and make the guest into the host, and instead control this powerful woman. This would save a lot of headaches.

When he thought of this, his heart couldn't help but start beating.

When he returned with Teng Yi to the manor, Wu Guo came and said, "Lady Ya has arrived. She's currently chatting with your two wives."

Xiang Shaolong signalled with his eyes towards Teng Yi. The latter understood and pulled Wu Guo off to the side to speak.

Upon entering the inner hall, he saw the three ladies seated in one corner, whispering quietly to each other. Xiang Shaolong felt very curious. Just as he was pondering why Shan Rou was acting on such good behavior, Tian Zhen and Tian Feng, off to one side, chimed in unison, "Master Dong has returned!"

The three women all turned to look towards him as one. Smiles appeared on their faces, like flowers blooming beautifully. When adding in the faces of the Tian sisters, who definitely were not inferior to them in beauty, Xiang Shaolong felt his eyes going dizzy and almost lost track of place and time.

Zhao Ya laughed, "Ya'er brought some ornaments over as gifts for sister Rou, Zhi Zhi, little Zhuo, and little Feng. They all like it a lot!"

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed to himself, "So that's how it is!" He arrived by their side and sat down.

Tian Zhen came over. "Master Dong! Can we begin to eat?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded. "I'm about to die of hunger. Where did little Jun go?"

Zhao Ya said, "He went to the pastures this morning. He still hasn't come back."

Xiang Shaolong rose to his feet. "Ya'er! I have something to discuss with you."

Shan Rou unhappily said, "Are you treating the rest of us as outsiders? What do you have to hide?"

Xiang Shaolong felt unhappy. Just as his eyebrows began to rise, Shan Rou let out a giggling laugh. Pulling Zhao Zhi up by the hand, she said, "Don't be so serious, I was just joking!"

After glancing at him sideways, she took her sister off to a corner to pore over the gifts they just received, full of joy.

Xiang Shaolong wasn't sure if he should laugh or cry. Sitting down, he shook his head and forced a smile. "A wild horse will remain a wild horse!"

Zhao Ya said, "I also have something to discuss with you. Just now, my imperial brother summoned me to the palace and

asked if he could totally trust you. I replied, 'No matter what, Dong Kuang is at least more trustworthy than Guo Kai!'"

Xiang Shaolong's curiosity was aroused. "And how did he react?"

Zhao Ya said, "At first, he was very unhappy, but I asked him, who had risked his life to save Lord Longyang? Who retrieved Lu Gong's secret manual for him? This rendered him without any other arguments."

Thinking of Empress Jing, Xiang Shaolong offhandedly asked, "Does Guo Kai also have an affair with Empress Jing?"

Zhao Ya felt slightly astounded. "I don't know. I imagine it can't be possible! This woman has always treated the affections of men very lightly. If I recall correctly, she has only ever had sketchy relationships with Prince Xinling and Zhao Mu. Where did you hear this from?"

Instead of answering, Xiang Shaolong asked, "King Xiaocheng really doesn't inquire into her affairs?"

Zhao Ya said, "My imperial brother only wants the Empress to not bother him. As long as she doesn't make her affairs public, my imperial brother is happy to let things be as they are. Oh! He's also a bit afraid of her! You still haven't told me where you got your news from!"

Xiang Shaolong said, "Lord Longyang told me. Logically speaking, he wouldn't lie to his savior and benefactor."

Zhao Ya was briefly stunned. Slowly, her face became imposing. "If my guess is correct, Guo Kai must have sought

out Lord Longyang to try and discern whether or not, in the event of a rebellion, Wei would support that woman. That must be why Lord Longyang would make such a guess."

Feeling a hint of fear, Xiang Shaolong said, "Does this mean Empress Jing and Guo Kai have their own separate scheme?"

Worried, Zhao Ya replied, "Imperial brother's health has been declining with each passing day. Right now, everyone is scheming to benefit themselves. At times, even I'm not sure who is in league with who, much less you."

Shan Rou's voice drifted over. "Come eat! The rice and dishes are growing cold!"

Zhao Ya stood up. "You need to be cautious of Zhao Mu. That traitor is an expert at using deceit and poison, and his techniques are strange and unfathomable. You'll be in trouble before you even know it."

Xiang Shaolong's tall frame rose as well. With one arm, he pulled her into his embrace. He whispered into her ear, "Ya'er, do you have any way to depart from Zhao's borders before Lord Longyang's farewell dinner? Afterwards, I'll meet up with you. This will make my plan of retreat much simpler."

Zhao Ya's fragrant body trembled. Biting her lip, she lowered her head and quietly said, "Can you give me some time to think?"

Xiang Shaolong couldn't bear to press her. Nodding, he agreed. He pulled her to the dinner table. When Teng Yi

entered, he waited until Xiang Shaolong gestured him in before going to the table and seating himself on a sitting mat as well.

Tian Zhen was just about to pour Xiang Shaolong some wine, when he said, "I'm not drinking tonight."

Shan Rou glanced at him, revealing a pondering look in her eyes.

Xiang Shaolong reached out and curled his arm around Tian Zhen's pretty little waist. "Zhen'er, are you familiar with Zhao Mu's Reclining Traveler's Veranda?"

Tian Zhen obediently knelt down as well, nodding.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is there any place within the veranda where one might be able to hide something around the size of a silk manuscript?"

After deeply pondering, Tian Zhen replied, "That room is filled with gifts others have given to that traitor. He doesn't put any documents or manuscripts there."

Tian Feng interjected, "That place didn't even have a cupboard. But we have been gone for such a long time that I don't know if it's still the same."

Zhao Ya worriedly said, "Do you want to go there to secretly read those oaths of loyalty? Right now, Zhao Mu's nerves are as tight as a bird startled by the twang of a bow. At night, he has vicious dogs patrolling. Please don't go, alright?"

Teng Yi said, "There must be a series of tunnels installed in his manor. Do any of you know about such a thing?"

Zhao Ya and the others all shook their head unknowingly.

Tian Zhen suddenly let out a tender cry. "I remember! Beneath the main building, there's a cellar which is used to store weapons. But I don't know if the Reclining Traveler's Veranda also has such a cellar."

Upon hearing her words have no bearing on any tunnels, everyone's excitement, which had just been lit, was doused promptly.

Shan Rou sneered, "Even if you knew where the exit to the tunnel is, if I were Zhao Mu, I would have people guarding them, as well as have installed copper tubes to listen to any noise. I would know if so much as a fly entered the tunnels."

Zhao Zhi laughed, "Shaolong, ask sister Rou and see what ideas she can come up with for entering the manor!"

Everyone was stunned. They suddenly remembered that Shan Rou had once attempted to assassinate Zhao Mu within his own palace before safely escaping.

Shan Rou pouted her little lips. "He's a peerless hero who travels alone and does as he pleases. How could he use the help of a woman like myself? Moreover, I, Shan Rou, don't have any part in his magnificent undertaking. I might as well save my breath and take a good nap instead."

Zhao Ya was the first to burst out laughing. "Dear sister Rou, how can our Master Dong not have you take good care of

him tonight, after seeing how full of resentment you are? Sister Rou, don't think too much on it."

Turning, she winked towards Xiang Shaolong. "Isn't that right, Master Dong?"

Xiang Shaolong helplessly forced out a smile. "Of course! I would like to ask Miss Rou to take this humble little soldier to the marquis' residence for a stroll tonight."

Shan Rou's anger and resentment turned into excitement. Glancing at him, she said, "Oh, so you're begging me now? Don't act as though you've been forced into it. Even though I'm slightly inferior to you in lowly tricks such as stealing hens and dogs, if we are to compare our skills in infiltrating houses and assassinating people, who in the world is a match for me, Shan Rou? Otherwise, why is it that Tian Dan must tread so cautiously and carefully?"

Zhao Zhi's face changed. "Sister Rou! Now is not the time for assassination!"

Shan Rou impatiently said, "That's just a metaphor."

Standing up, she said, "I need to go prepare."

As she walked away, she saw that Xiang Shaolong was still staring stupidly at her. She loudly shouted, "Why aren't you scrambling? Go and get prepared! I still have to dress you with a special 'water cloth'!"

Not paying any attention to all the people who were staring at her in amazement, she went into her room.

CHAPTER 4

Exploring Marquis' Resident At Night

[Translated by SLYPHIAD and REN WO XING]

DUSK is approaching.

A carriage headed out of the residence.

Both Wu Guo, who was masquerading as a fake Dong Kuang, and Teng Yi, surrounded with a group of guards and Lady Ya's bodyguards, rode out escorting the carriage.

The real Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou were hiding inside the carriage. Both had changed into their water-resistant deer

skin cloth, only revealing an opening in the face, fists and feet, looking slightly like the 21st century's diving suit.

The one that Xiang Shaolong wears was originally made for Zhao Zhi by Shan Rou. Fortunately, Zhao Zhi's built tall and big, and deer skin is also flexible so he could still wear it with a little bit of difficulty.

Beside their climbing tools, weapons and secret weapons, they also each brought a copper pipe, in case they need to breathe under the water.

But until now, Shan Rou was still reluctant to reveal the secret entrance to the resident. This left Xiang Shaolong feeling very vexed.

Zhao Ya was watching Xiang Shaolong's beautifully shaped body wearing the tight deer skin suit. His imposing and invigorate body were shining with charms. Bewitched, she didn't care that there was other people around. She rushed into his embrace, panting with an enchanting expression.

Xiang Shaolong stroked her shoulder with one hand, while opening the other hand wide and said towards Shan Rou, "Sister Rou, why don't you come and join us?"

Shan Rou glared at him then purposely moved away towards the window and gazed outside.

Xiang Shaolong had known from early on that she wouldn't be submit and be obedient to anyone. He leaned towards Zhao Ya's ear, "Have Ya'er thought about it?"

Zhao Ya knew that he was talking about her leaving Zhao first, in a pleading tone requested, "How about this? How about you leave first then after awhile, I will come out and meet you. Ai! If you want me to leave without knowing that you'll be safe, Ya'er will be worried sick of you."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "If your brother suddenly passed away and the power falls onto Empress Jing, would she let go off you? By that time, I've already returned to Xianyang. It'll be beyond the reach of my power to help you."

Zhao Ya disdainfully answered, "Her position won't be stable immediately. She won't have the time to take care of me. Besides she is afterall a Han, if after she just gained her position, she tried to get rid of the royal clan, the nobility and ministers would put a stop to it. At that time, if I would like to leave, she would be more than happy to let me go! Ai! Shaolong! What I'm afraid of is another thing!"

After she had spoken these words, she grew silent.

Shan Rou didn't hear it clearly, annoyed, "Zhao Ya, can you please speak louder?"

Both of them didn't know whether to cry or laugh.

Xiang Shaolong ignored her and turned towards Zhao Ya, "What are you afraid of, Ya'er?"

Zhao Ya hugged him tightly, dejected, "I'm afraid that other people wouldn't be able to forgive me."

Xiang Shaolong had long been worried over this. He tried to console her, "Once we returned to Xianyang, I will help you

to speak with Tingfang and Princess Qian. They have a big heart. They wouldn't hold a grudge against you. Don't worry about the others! This is what you call atone for a crime by good deeds!"

At this time, Teng Yi shouted from outside the carriage, "Get ready! We're approaching the Marquis Resident. Oh! What a coincidence! Tian Dan's carriage is moving towards us."

All conversation stopped inside the carriage. Both Xiang and Shan hid in the corner, while Lady Ya lifted up the curtain and looked outside.

As Tian Dan's carriage was slowly approaching, both carriages slowly came to a full stop.

The fake Dong Kuang, Wu Guo, whipped his horse, with Teng Yi approached Tian Dan to greet him.

Tian Dan stood near the open carriage's window, laughed, "General Dong is so hard working. While we are out drinking wine and having fun, you are working non-stop all day all night. But there's a limit to how much you can push your body. General Dong, please make sure that you don't exhaust yourself."

Wu Guo imitated Xiang Shaolong's voice, blandly smiled, "I was born as a hard worker. The busier I am, the more spirited I become. Thank you for your concern, Prime Minister Tian."

No matter the voice, tone or attitude, all unbelievably resemble him, which makes other people shake their heads at this.

Under the bickering light from the lantern, even with Tian Dan's sharp eyes, there wasn't any flaw. After nodding and smiling, he turned towards Zhao Ya, "Lady's countenance is glowing and Lady's expression is very spirited these last few days. Can Lady tell me what the secret to this is?"

Everyone was frozen in fear. They all knew there was a hidden meaning behind this question at Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya, of course, had her own way, grinned, "Zhao Ya won't let off that easily! Prime Minister Tian is just teasing me."

After she said, she quickly closed the curtain.

Tian Dan laughed out loud. After greeting both 'Dong Kuang' and Teng Yi, he gave order to move out.

Both carriages crossed each other.

Xiang Shaolong gestured towards Shan Rou.

It's time to get off the carriage.

Both of them took advantage of the night to sneak into the Marquis resident through the dense forest in the southwest.

Xiang Shaolong didn't understand what Shan Rou brought inside the gourd up till they've arrived on the small river.

Shan Rou pulled him to squat down with her, "Any mansion, that has a pond, will always has an entrance and an exit for

the water. This is Shan Rou's big secret. Last time, this is how I sneaked into the pool inside that traitor's resident. If we're lucky, it might even take us straight to Jade Peach Garden."

After saying this, she looked proudly at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong said, "It's around 100zhang (333m) from here to Marquis Resident, how do we breathe?"

Shan Rou raised an eyebrow at him, annoyed, "Idiot! I can go in. Naturally, there's a way to breathe. What do you think the copper tube is for? Unless it is after a heavy rain, otherwise there is always a small gap between the river's water height and the tunnel's height. As long as we breathe from one end of the copper tube and the other reaches out of the water, wouldn't that solve the problem?"

Xiang Shaolong gasped in admiration. His heart was trembling in excitement. Suddenly he reached over and passionately kissed her, the other hand grabbed her waist tightly.

Shan Rou was caught unaware allowing him to steal a kiss off her, after struggling in vain briefly, she kissed him back passionately.

To show his gratitude, Xiang Shaolong kneaded her breast shortly before releasing her, "This is my award!"

Shan Rou was blushing till her face and ears are red, after all she was still young. She glared at him and then leapt first into the river.

In an instant, both have dived a metre deep and have seen that the tunnel ahead is dark. They persisted and swam deeper into the tunnel slowly.

Xiang Shaolong was filled with strange feeling.

Every time he performed a task at night, he always felt this change from light to dark feelings.

Just like the light and dark world, both existed together. Common people generally only knows about living during daylight, but they have no idea whatsoever towards this demonic darkness world.

This time working at night, he can only rely on his tactile sense. In this quiet and still tunnel, his senses have grown stronger.

This caused people to step with caution, another world filled with danger and excitement. It is truly a luring world.

After a short awhile, they both came out of the exit and arrived at the lotus pond at the center of the garden at the back of the resident under the bridge.

Within this ringed courtyard, the stars could be seen cascading across the night sky. A misty beam of moonlight shone down, as the sound of the pond frogs croaking could be heard. It was truly an entirely different world.

From afar, a pair of sentries strolled towards them. As the two peered towards the sentries, two extremely strange-looking large green spots of light attracted their especial attention.

Alarmed, Xiang Shaolong hurriedly grabbed Shan Rou by the hand and pulled her down into the water.

His heart was thumping wildly.

It seemed as though those two large green spots of light came from lamp light reflected off of the pupils of giant dogs. These enormous dogs normally would only be allowed to roam around freely late at night, but had been released early in order to heighten the security of the area.

After the sentries passed by the bridge and walked far away, the two lifted their heads up from the water. Shan Rou softly said, "Damn! With those beasts patrolling the land, the only option we have is to slowly make our way via the water. If the Reclining Traveler's Veranda is also protected by two giant hounds, we'll have no choice but to go home and go sleep."

Xiang Shaolong also could not help but feel extremely discouraged, but to give up midway through would be even more of a shame. He forcefully roused himself and headed confidently with Shan Rou in the direction of the Jade Peach Garden, as they separately swam through the pool.

Xiang Shaolong had received strict, intensive underwater training, and agilely glided through the water like a fish. Based on the minute eddies and flows of the current, he discovered a place the water flowed out towards. As both he and Shan Rou raised their heads up out of the water, they both exultantly said, "Found it!"

But then, both of them silently called out in dismay.

Which of the two flowed to the Jade Peach Garden? Or did both flow somewhere else? Neither of them could be certain. What was even more frustrating was that both of the secret underwater passages were hidden at the bottom of the pond, and neither had any breathing spaces whatsoever. If one was not able to swim all the way through the passage in a single breath, they would suffocate and die. What a rotten, unfair death that would be!

Xiang Shaolong was quick-witted. Nibbling at Shan Rou's ear, he said, "Let's each take a separate passage. As soon as we figure out where it leaves, both of us need to immediately return. No matter what, we can't try to show off."

Agreeing, Shan Rou left.

Letting out a deep sigh, Xiang Shaolong dove deep into the water. Entering the underwater passageway, he advanced ten feet and discovered that the water was winding towards the left. He hurriedly retreated back the way he came, moving backwards. Within the narrow corridor, it was very difficult to actually turn around.

Shan Rou said, "I swam at least twenty feet forward. The path forward seems to be safe, but we are extremely far from the Jade Peach Garden. How can we possibly swim across without taking any breaths?"

Xiang Shaolong was already recalling and meditating on the cloth map which Pu Bu gave him. "There's yet another pond between this place and the Jade Peach Garden. I think the underwater passage would first pass through that pond."

Even as stalwart a person as Shan Rou couldn't help but feel discouraged. "Even if the pond was placed directly in the middle, it has to be at least a hundred or so feet away. We won't be able to make it that far."

Xiang Shaolong had a brilliant idea. "I have a solution. If we plug one end of our copper tubes, and cover the other end with our hands, it should be more than enough to give us two or three extra 'breaths' of air. Wouldn't that allow us to get to the pond?"

A look of astonishment appeared in Shan Rou's eyes. "Looks like you aren't a total idiot after all. But what will we use to plug one end?"

Xiang Shaolong had a wicked idea in mind. "All I'm wearing underneath this skin-suit is a pair of shorts. Are you wearing anything underneath yours?"

Extremely embarrassed, Shan Rou said, "You are such a lecher. Eek!"

Xiang Shaolong pulled Shan Rou to the artificial man-made 'mountain' in the middle of the pond and unbuttoned her swim suit. Only after allowing his hand to explore and roam freely for a while did he tear off a large piece of her underskirt.

Shan Rou was unusually docile, not attacking him with words as usual. Perhaps it was because she knew that this was unavoidable and so she was resigned to it. Or perhaps it was that she was willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of

killing Zhao Mu and Tian Dan. And, after all, Xiang Shaolong had already 'taken full advantage' of her long ago!

As she watched Xiang Shaolong tear the silk apart and use it to stuff the tubes, she dubiously said, "Will it leak out air?" She couldn't help but being concerned over her fate.

Filled with confidence, Xiang Shaolong said, "With three layers of cloth wrapped around it, after the cloth becomes wet, it might let out a little bit of air, but by then, we'll have surfaced long ago. Come!"

The two swam to the passageway entrance, took a deep breath, covered one end of the tube with their hands, and moved into the passageway, with Shan Rou leading the way.

The two rapidly moved in deeper.

After taking about thirty or so steps, the two had to take their first 'breath'. By their 'second breath', the two of them had long ago become light-headed and dizzy. They felt as though the air in the tubes had become exhausted. Without caring about anything else, the two advanced as quickly as possible.

The exit appeared up ahead of them, faintly glimmering.

Overjoyed, the two made their way to it. Rising to the surface, the two rested against the shore and gulped in the precious commodity, air, which they normally paid no attention to.

They were surrounded by trees in all directions. Flowers and trees surrounded the pond, and a house jutted up on top of

a stone 'mountain'. It was a very small garden, but the decorations were extremely exquisite.

Each time Xiang Shaolong had previously come to the manor, his movements had been restricted to a few main buildings. He had never imagined that it would also have such an exquisite place as this.

The garden was very lonely. No voices could be heard, and only a few lonely lanterns were lit, immersing the pond in pale, yellow moonlight.

Panting, Shan Rou said, "The situation is even worse. We haven't swum more than a hundred or so feet, and this place has to be at least two hundred feet away from the Jade Peach Garden. How will the air in the tubes be enough?"

Xiang Shaolong was just thinking the same thing. As he blankly stared at Shan Rou, he suddenly had a brainstorm. "Give me a kiss, and I'll be able to think of something."

Shan Rou was stunned for quite some time. Lowering her head, she said in a quiet voice, "If you're lying to me, I'll butcher you."

Wrapping her hand around the back of his neck, she gave him a scorching, savory kiss.

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps could be heard. The two of them immediately sank down beneath the water, but their tongues continued to intertwine with one another's.

Only after they could no longer hold their breaths did they rise to the surface. The sentries were long gone by now.

The two of them were both filled with an emotion which would be etched into their bones and which they would remember for the rest of their days, especially considering it came about in such a dangerous, crisis-laden situation.

Not able to bear being separated from him, Shan Rou tightly clasped herself to him. Panting, she said, "Tell!"

Xiang Shaolong said, "Let's take off our headgear and use it to cover the tubes. Wouldn't that give us a few extra breaths?"

Shan Rou jubilantly placed kisses on both of his cheeks. "You really are worthy of having been my first man! Only, I'll be in charge of the manufacturing. I don't trust your handiwork."

Xiang Shaolong frowned. "What do you mean, your 'first' man? Miss, are you planning on having a second and a third?"

Shan Rou naturally and easily replied, "If you men can have multiple women, why can't us women have multiple men?"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned. "Then who would dare marry you?"

Shan Rou wrinkled her nose, making a ghastly face. "Who says I have to marry? The world is such a huge place. If we manage to kill Zhao Mu and Tian Dan, I'll wander around the world. If I get tired, maybe I'll come find you one day! By that time, it'll be your choice whether or not to accept me."

Xiang Shaolong discovered that he really liked this woman. Compared to others, she was much more similar to the staunch, independent ladies of the 21st century.

Shan Rou paid him no more mind. Pulling out a small dagger from her suit, she went to work.

Because of their previous experience, this time, they were much more cautious when it came to taking breaths. They easily passed another two hundred or so feet of underwater passageways before arriving at the man-made creek of the Jade Peach Garden. They stealthily made their way to the Reclining Traveler's Veranda.

The man-made creek was roughly ten feet wide. The water wove around in a stream like a dragonfly, as beautiful houses, trees, and flowers unfolded in their path, one after another.

The security presence became much tighter as well. Lanterns were hung up on every major road passing through the Reclining Traveler's Veranda. Guards were everywhere, and there were people leading giant hounds on leashes as well. If it weren't for this underwater route, even if Xiang Shaolong had access to his 21st century accessories and tools, it would be harder than ascending to heaven for him to have gotten so far without attracting any notice.

The closest the creek came to the Reclining Traveler's Veranda was around ten or so feet. The two observed the situation for quite some time before they located the

position of each and every hidden observer. They emerged from the water, underneath a bridge.

After ascertaining that there were no vicious hounds nearby, Xiang Shaolong waved towards Shan Rou as he scurried out from underneath the bridge. Using a row of flowers as cover, he quickly rushed over to stand next to a tightly closed window. Pulling out a steel needle, Xiang Shaolong inserted the needle into an aperture in the window and undid the lock.

The two nimbly flipped inside the veranda, then closed the window and re-bolted it. Both of them felt utterly exhausted and sat down next to a corner of the wall.

Shan Rou lit a match. Xiang Shaolong quickly used his hands to cover it, preventing the fire light from seeping outwards.

The reflected light from the flame gradually lit up the inside of the veranda.

The inside was decorated elegantly, with twenty or so exquisitely made wooden cabinets held within its spacious bowels, each of which was filled with all sorts of rare treasures.

The center of the veranda was covered with a felt carpet. Surrounding the carpet were four comfortable, spacious sitting-mattresses which were covered with animal-skin.

Just as Xiang Shaolong was secretly praising Zhao Mu for knowing how to enjoy himself, Shan Rou excitedly said, "Look!"

Xiang Shaolong looked towards where she pointed. Resting on top of two of the treasure cabinets lay a large metal chest, roughly five feet tall. It looked totally out of place.

Shan Rou stroked the giant lock on top of the metal chest. Vexed, she said, "This is the first time I've seen a lock like this. How do you open it?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled. "I'm a grandmaster lock picker. Let me try."

Just as he grasped the lock, and before he had a chance to take a close look at it, voices could suddenly be heard coming from the main door.

Shan Rou swept a glance across the room. In a low voice, she said, "Onto the roof beams!"

She pulled out a grappling hook.

The sound of the door opening could be heard.

Xiang Shaolong extinguished the match she was holding as Shan Rou shot out the grappling hook. She accurately and precisely hooked the crossbeam pillars in the ceiling of the room.

In the darkness, Xiang Shaolong did not dare to rashly shoot out his own hook. Grinding his teeth fiercely, he said, "Hold on to me!"

Grabbing the rope tightly, he began to climb up.

Shan Rou knew that the situation was critical. She tightly clasped her arms around his broad waist and put her life in his hands.

The main door opened. Someone shouted out, "Light the lanterns, and open the windows! The Marquis and his guest are about to arrive."

Xiang Shaolong secretly groaned in dismay. Exhausting every bit of strength he had, he clambered up frantically, as Shan Rou quickly pulled the dangling rope up along with them.

A lantern by the door was lit.

Ten or so sentries walked in. If any of them raised their head up at this moment, there would be no place for them to escape to.

Fortunately, at this moment, the only things on the sentries' minds were to light the lamps and open the windows. For the moment, no one had the leisure to stare at the ceiling for no good reason.

The two were extremely alarmed. As they huddled in the space between the roof beams and the roof, the space below them grew brightened, and fresh air rushed in, taking away the previous, stuffy air.

Shan Rou moved her dainty lips and gave him a kiss, expressing her admiration.

The sound of footsteps could be heard, followed by Zhao Mu's voice. "All of you get out, now."

Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou's hearts were both thumping wildly. They knew that Zhao Mu was about to bring Tian Dan and Li Yuan here. Without question, he must be intending to let them take a look at those 'oaths of loyalty' as a demonstration of his power and influence. Maybe they even had important business to discuss. They couldn't help but grow tense.

CHAPTER 5

A Shocking Revelation

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

KACHA!

The sound of a giant lock opening reverberated in the quiet chamber, sending fear into the hearts.

With their heads side by side, Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou were prone on a ceiling beam. They locked themselves in that position by inserting their daggers into the beam for support. Unless someone climbs up the supporting round pillar for a look, this is the best hiding spot.

The horizontal beam is supported by eight vertical pillars which formed the foundation for the roof and is thirty feet above the ground.

Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou had a quick glimpse below and saw Tian Dan and Li Yuan seated at two small coffee tables. Zhao Mu is reaching out to a giant metal chest to retrieve an object.

The Liu Brothers are kneeling behind Tian Dan submissively. One of them even scanned the ceiling which caused them to shrink their heads in fear.

Zhao Mu returned to his own desk and placed the whole stack of loyalty letters on it. There were sounds of flipping.

Li Yuan laughed, "Marquis is indeed brilliant to think of such an exciting method to control your spies."

Tian Dan added in laughter, "Is this your own inspiration or were you enlightened by your subordinates?"

Zhao Mu laughed back, "Who cares!"

He took credit for Xiang Shaolong's creativity without a tinge of guilt.

Xiang Shaolong was relieved that Zhao Mu did not show Tian Dan his own loyalty letter or Tian Dan would start to suspect him.

Zhao Mu is extremely guarded against Li Yuan. If he divulged Dong Kuang's real identity, it would be as good as letting Li Yuan know about his relationship with Lord Chunshen.

Li Yuan expressed in admiration, "To think that even Zhao Mingxiong is in your payroll. I have always thought that he is loyal to Li Mu and Lian Po. You are truly a genius!"

Up in the beam, Xiang Shaolong almost fell down in shock. Zhao Mingxiong is his Assistant General. He and Teng Yi have nothing but praise for his work. He cannot imagine him to be a traitor as well.

Zhao Mu proudly states, "He is not only my men but also my relative. When I got him to join Li Mu, it is to plot against him. Unexpectedly, Lian Po made him the Assistant General to Le Cheng. I purposely sidelined him and Zhao Ya that foolish slut even spoke up for him in front of King Xiaocheng. This is hilarious!"

Xiang Shaolong was bathed in cold sweat. What a close shave! He felt like he is the owner of a pet tiger. If he did not take precautions, he may even die without knowing why. At the same time, he could relate to the power of Zhao Mu's hidden weapons.

He thought about his morning conversation with King Xiaocheng regarding the issue of the palace guards. If something happens to Cheng Xu, Zhao Mu can promote Zhao Mingxiong to be head of the palace guards. With this, Zhao Mu will indirectly control both the City guards and the Palace guards.

As Xiang Shaolong was hoping Li Yuan will continue with the loyalty letter name list, Tian Dan interrupted, "How is Empress Jing's situation?"

Zhao Mu arrogantly replied, "Who can guess our real relationship? Not to mention Xiaocheng, even Guo Kai and Zhao Ya have been deceived by us. Han Jing (Empress Jing is Han royalty) acts cold but she is full of passion inside. When she falls in love, she has no reservations. It is my great fortune that she is devoted to me and kept dissuading King Xiaocheng from recalling Li Mu or Lian Po. Otherwise, I would not be able to sit here and talk to both of you."

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted and could not believe what he has just heard.

Are they putting up an act or is it just wishfully thinking on Zhao Mu's part?

Li Yuan implored, "Can Empress Jing really controls Dong Kuang?"

On the beam, Xiang Shaolong's heart is thumping wildly and even Shan Rou can sense his palpitation.

Tian Dan concluded, "Dong Kuang appears to be straightforward and uneducated but he is full of strategies and knows how to pander to those in power. He helped Empress Jing settled the plot between Han Chuang and Prince Xinling while keeping Xiaocheng in the dark. He has laid his bets on Empress Jing, hoping that when Xiaocheng is dead, he will be able to spread his wings. This man must not live."

Li Yuan coldly promised, "I must kill him myself."

Zhao Mu plainly said, "This man is of great use now. Luckily, he did not know that Empress Jing is my woman. Humph! This man forgets his principles when he identifies gains. Even if Imperial Uncle does not act, I will not let him go."

Xiang Shaolong finally calmed down and did his analysis. He screwed up on Han Chuang's incident. The most hateful is Empress Jing who had betrayed him to Zhao Mu. They are definitely a pair of scheming adulterers.

Tian Dan suddenly mentioned, "Both gentlemen have neglected an important figure."

Zhao Mu and Li Yuan were taken aback.

Tian Dan explained, "That person is Xiang Shaolong. He is definitely connected to Le Cheng's death. We are still puzzled about why he chose to kill Le Cheng first."

He paused and continued, "If Xiaocheng is behind this, there will be some traces of evidence. There will be injuries, deaths, or missing people in his trusted troops. We did not see any of these so he is not involved. This is getting more and more interesting."

Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou were petrified.

Tian Dan revealed, "I did remind Dong Kuang to search Le Cheng's men for spies. Apparently, he did not investigate or could not find any evidence. We cannot interfere ourselves or we will expose our intentions."

Li Yuan suggested, "Dong Kuang is the main beneficiary in his death. Could it be done by him?"

Zhao Mu cut in, "He had no idea he can be the City Commander. If not for my instruction to Empress Jing to recommend him to Xiaocheng, he will be dead before it is his turn."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed as he finally understood why Empress Jing looked up to him.

Tonight's extraordinary opportunity to eavesdrop in their meeting is a godsend. Otherwise he will end up as a muddle-headed ghost.

Tian Dan observed, "Dong Kuang can pretend to be sick but none of his men are injured or dead. He has nothing to do with Le Cheng's death."

Zhao Mu sighed, "Le Cheng has numerous enemies. It is hard to judge who the killer is. As long as they leave the city quickly, we cannot determine who they are."

Tian Dan resolutely swore, "It must be Xiang Shaolong. I know he is here. Otherwise, Zhao Ya will not regain her energetic lifestyle. I met her and Dong Kuang outside the residence. Her carefree and graceful disposition can only come from a woman who has reignited the love of her life."

Li Yuan joked, "Can she be in love with Dong Kuang?"

Zhao Mu's countenance changed, "Chancellor Tian is right. Xiang Shaolong must be in town. I am familiar with her behaviour. Dong Kuang is just a playmate. The only man in her heart is Xiang Shaolong. Xiang Shaolong may even be hiding out in her residence."

Tian Dan emotionally recommended, "This is highly probable. Regardless of whether it is true or not, we can still get Zhao Ya into trouble. Once we find evidence of Xiang Shaolong's existence, there is no way she can talk herself out of trouble. Now, Guo Kai and Cheng Xu are trying to outperform Dong Kuang and they will leap at this opportunity to prove themselves. Does Marquis understand my meaning?"

Zhao Mu laughed out in admiration, "Chancellor Tian is a master strategist who offers great plans. I have a better suggestion. We get Empress Jing to command Dong Kuang to carry out this matter. By putting some flying needles and bloodied clothes in her personal room, Zhao Ya can never redeem herself; This can also test Dong Kuang's loyalty to Empress Jing. Hng! I have long wanted to deal with this slut."

On the beam, both persons looked at each other and were wet with cold sweat.

The three devils below them are full of evil schemes. Even if they are aware of what is coming, they are unable to counteract them in such a short time.

Tian Dan stood up and commented, "We should not stay for too long or this banquet will arouse suspicions. When Marquis ascend the throne, do not forget about Chancellor and Imperial Uncle."

Zhao Mu hurriedly expressed his gratitude.

With the sound of the metal chest being locked, the trio left the chamber.

After the residence guards came in to secure the windows and doors and extinguish the candles, Shan Rou whispered into her ear, "What shall we do!"

Xiang Shaolong is filled with deathly calm and softly replied, "The loyalty letters are not urgent. If we can return safely, we will win the battle."

Xiang Shaolong looks enlightened and is full of vigour.

The lethargy from last night has completely vanished and so has all the doubts in his mind. He is now fully aware about the entire situation ahead of him and the connection between Zhao Mu and Empress Jing.

Tian Zhen had just stepped into his bedroom and noticed that he is awake. She happily scrambled to his side and greeted, "Master Dong! Let me wait on you."

Xiang Shaolong was pleased and he got up and washed up. He went to the main hall where Teng Yi, Zhao Zhi and Shan Rou were having their breakfast.

Teng Yi and Wu Guo masquerading as Dong Kuang purposely stayed at the Command Centre until the third watch. This is the first time they met since he spied on Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Rou Rou should have told you about all that has transpired!"

Teng Yi nodded, "She was very clear. Regarding scheming, we are nowhere near Zhao Mu and Tian Dan's level. If not for the eavesdropping last night, none of us will return to Xianyang alive."

Zhao Zhi was worried, "How should we handle their plan to make you harm Lady Ya?"

Xiang Shaolong thought that last night's episode is like gathering intelligence in 21st century. He smiled, "We can counter every attack they throw at us. The most favourable condition is that they did not suspect my identity as Dong Kuang and mistaken me as an apple-polisher. Even Zhao Mu dare not reveal our secret relationship. Based on this, we can fight them till the end."

Teng Yi sighed, "To think that Zhao Mingxiong is Zhao Mu's lackey. I have had high hopes for him."

Xiang Shaolong straightened his neck and solemnly said, "I did not believe that Empress Jing is devoted to Zhao Mu. This vicious woman is likely to use Zhao Mu to achieve her own means. If I can understand her true motives, everything will be fantastic."

Shan Rou frowned, "You have spoken so much and are unafraid. Do you have a good plan? Empress Jing may summon you anytime to harm Zhao Ya!"

Without restrain, Xiang Shaolong shrugged his shoulders and ate the bun in his hand. He patted Teng Yi on the shoulder and stood up, "We are off to see Lady Ya. Both of you wait here for my return."

Under Shan Rou's cursing and Zhao Zhi's whining, they left the residence.

Riding side by side along the long street, Teng Yi checked, "Should we make new arrangements to the City defences?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and answered, "Nope. This will raise Zhao Mingxiong and Zhao Mu's alarm. Please fetch Little Jun back and see what he has to report on the Qi army."

As they spoke, Zhao Ya's residence came into view. Xiang Shaolong went into her place while Teng Yi returned to the Command Centre.

At noon, Zhao Mu sent someone to fetch him. Xiang Shaolong knew about the upcoming plot and expected this.

Inside the secret chamber of the Marquis residence, Zhao Mu put on a look of trust and confidence before declaring, "Li Yuan is tricked and thought that I will cooperate with him. Hng! I will not let him leave Handan City alive."

Xiang Shaolong did not believe a single word that he said but acted delighted instead.

Zhao Mu revealed a sinister smile and inquired, "We can talk about that later. How are you managing Empress Jing and Zhao Ya? Tian Dan mentioned that he met you and Zhao Ya in the same horse carriage last night."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a grin, "Zhao Ya is a born slut. As long as I please her on bed, there is nothing she will not do for me. I am also getting into the good books of Empress Jing. There is something I have yet to report to you. I have killed all the assassins of Prince Xinling. They were hiding

with Han Chuang. With this, I have gained the trust of Xiaocheng and gain the favour of Empress Jing, killing two birds with one stone. When we take further actions, there will be fewer hindrances from these two. I am now trying to persuade Xiaocheng to give me the other half of the army seal. Once I have it, I will have full powers to deploy the entire army. Marquis will not have any worry about the rebellion by then.”

Zhao Mu was touched as he did not expect this report from Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong was laughing to himself.

This traitor has suspected his loyalty as he had kept this incident from him, thinking that he has submitted to Empress Jing. Now that he has been fully honest about the palace robbery, Zhao Mu is at a dilemma and became indecisive.

Zhao Mu stared at him for a while and asked in a deep voice, “Why have you not reported this to me as early as you could?”

Xiang Shaolong innocently responded, “This is a small matter and I have never thought of reporting to you. Only when you asked me about Empress Jing’s progress that it came to my mind. The two crucial fixtures are Empress Jing and Zhao Ya. With their full support, Xiaocheng will grant me full military command even with Guo Kai’s objection. Then, Handan City will be our playground. Ai! As long as I can repay the gratitude Lord Chunshen has bestowed on me, I, Dong

Kuang, am willing to undergo any danger without the slightest hesitation.”

Zhao Mu’s colour changed and frowned, “Is Xiaocheng behind Le Cheng’s death?”

Xiang Shaolong almost burst out laughing, “Definitely not! Tian Dan got me to investigate the personal guards of Le Cheng to see if anyone backed out of his escort on that fateful night. My investigations have yet to be concluded but from what I see, the killer is likely to be Xiang Shaolong.”

Zhao Mu can no longer hide his fear and lowered his head in deep thought.

Xiang Shaolong is puzzled. He has said everything that he could to gain Zhao Mu’s former trust but it is not working. With a quick inspiration, he roughly guessed what is missing. He mysteriously lowered his voice and whispered, “Does Marquis want Cheng Xu out of the way? I have a marvellous scheme within a scheme.”

Zhao Mu raised his head in astonishment, “What scheme within a scheme?”

Xiang Shaolong simply visualize, “I have told Xiaocheng about the loyalty letters and bluffed him that I can steal them. As long as Marquis provide me a fake copy with Cheng Xu’s name, Xiaocheng will sack him immediately to protect himself.”

When Zhao Mu heard about the leak of the loyalty letters to Xiaocheng, there is no change in his expression. Xiaocheng

must have told Empress Jing about the letters who then leaked it to Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong sighed with relief. If he had not made this move, Zhao Mu will never trust him.

Sure enough, Zhao Mu's suspicions gradually dissipated. He sighed, "Wang Zhuo, in the future, you must report everything you did to avoid misunderstandings."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be flustered, "What! Marquis suspects my loyalty?"

Zhao Mu regained his composure and patted his shoulder before adding, "The storm is over and the weather is good. Do not have any doubts in your heart. As long as you do as I command, you will have a great and prosperous future."

Pausing for a moment, he continued, "The most important thing now is to retrieve the other half of the army seal and the imperial decree. You can then have full authority to deploy the army anyway you wish..." he stopped halfway.

Xiang Shaolong predicted that he has instructed Empress Jing to use him to harm Zhao Ya but could not say it out from his own mouth or risk exposing their relationship. He sincerely pleaded, "Marquis, please feel free to give any instructions!"

Zhao Mu removed his hand from Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and nodded, "Whatever you plan to do in the future, please discuss with me first. Never forget this."

Xiang Shaolong knows that Zhao Mu is still having some doubts. Using Empress Jing to command him, he wants to see if Xiang Shaolong will report to him as promised. Xiang Shaolong agreed to Zhao Mu's request and asked, "Does Marquis have any instructions for summoning me here?"

Zhao Mu looked awkward and forcefully said, "Just to ask how you have been. Oh! We can talk about the rest another time."

Xiang Shaolong knew that they have each achieved their goals and bade farewell.

Back at the command centre, he attended to his duties first before having a discussion with Teng Yi about Zhao Mu's meeting.

Teng Yi is full of praise, "If the City Guards and the Palace Guards are indirectly controlled by Zhao Mu and Empress Jing at his beck and call, Zhao Mu can rebel without Tian Dan's assistance. I am confused why he had not made his move yet. Is it so difficult to get Empress Jing to poison Xiaocheng?"

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "I am confused too. The only explanation must be Li Mu. If Xiaocheng died suddenly, Li Mu will be suspicious and send his army into Handan City against Zhao Mu. Even Tian Dan will not dare to face Li Mu's army. Zhao Mu's fantasy will be short-lived. Ai! I still do not believe Empress Jing will be satisfied to be under Zhao Mu's control. She is tasked to unite the three states and knows

that Zhao Mu is a Chu spy. There is no way she will submit to him whole-heartedly.”

Teng Yi shuddered, “Women like her who are enclosed in the palace for years cannot be judged by the common yardstick. From her looks, even when she is speaking with a smile on her face, you can feel the chill in her heart. Maybe Zhao Mu has an excellent way of fulfilling her desires that she is willing to do everything for him!”

Xiang Shaolong was shaken when he heard this. He has a faint idea of how to deal with Empress Jing but could not put it in words.

Changing the topic, he enquired, “How are the City defences?”

Teng Yi took a deep breath, “Luckily we found out who he is working for. He handed me a name list this morning about his suggestion to deploy the various military leaders. In the past, I would have no suspicions as he is more familiar with the troops and I trusted him. It is a different matter now.”

Xiang Shaolong acknowledged that it is a close shave and commented, “Zhao Mu did mention that he has four colonels who are his lackeys. This must be another trick. We will purposely make full use of these four men so that Zhao Mu can only suffer in silence.”

Teng Yi slapped the table and cried, “Suffer in silence. What a suitable quote! Third Brother you are full of wise proverbs. No wonder Talented Lady Ji has fallen for you.”

A guard came to report that Han Chuang is looking for him. They could guess what is coming and share a laugh before Xiang Shaolong left.

As predicted, it was Empress Jing who is looking for him.

This time, she is alone in a small hut deep inside the residence. There is food and wine on the table and she is chatting happily.

Reminded by Teng Yi, Xiang Shaolong paid attention to her eyes. Despite her joyful expressions, her eyes are expressionless and give people an icy cold feeling.

Is she a cold-blooded animal?

Recalling the times when she teased him and rejected him at the end confirmed this view.

If that is the case, what did Zhao Mu do to conquer her?

Pondering, his hand reached into his waist pockets and retrieves the aphrodisiac Han Chuang gave him and finally understood what Zhao Mu did.

On the last encounter, it did cross his mind to use this tool but it is a fantasy that is limited to one's imagination and would not be put to use. Under the present circumstances, his mindset regarding the use of this drug is different from the past.

His heartbeat uncontrollably quickened.

Empress Jing misunderstood his reaction and jested, "I cause you to be so nervous?"

Using one hand, he swiftly hid a small amount of the drug in his sleeve. Wondering how he could deliver this drug into the lips of this voluptuous beauty, he coughed, "Empress looks especially stunning and mesmerizing today."

Empress Jing eyes flashed. In the past, Xiang Shaolong would never detect this flashing. Now, things are different and she can no longer hide anything from him.

She personally lifted the wine flask and leaned forward, filling his cup. Batting an eye, she sighed, "All guys are the same. After you get used to looking, there will be nothing extraordinary!"

Deep inside, Xiang Shaolong cursed this lady for using this method to seduce him. He had an idea and lifted the cup to his nose proclaiming, "The wine poured by Empress Jing is especially aromatic!"

He moved the cup beyond her sight and smoothly added the drug. Raising the cup again with both hands, he toasted, "Let subject toast to the everlasting beauty and youth of Empress."

Which woman does not enjoy men's praising of their beauty? Even Empress Jing is not an exception. Elated, she raised her own cup and toasted, "I bless General Dong with a successful military career and never losing a single battle."

Xiang Shaolong deliberately laugh in a rough manner and explained, "Does Empress know that for tribesmen like us, we must cross our arms to drink during toasting so that our wishes will come true."

Empress Jing held her wine cup in surprise and asked, "What is cross-arm drinking?"

Xiang Shaolong moved forward right to her side and lean ahead slightly. He delivered his wine cup to her lips and said, "We cross our arms and drink each other's wine. Not a single drop must be left. Thereby, our wishes will come true."

Empress Jing's face reddened slightly and admired his daring act. If she refused to drink, she would be insincere. Helplessly putting on a smile on her face, she crossed her arms and shot him a look, admonishing, "Watch yourself. I like men who take it slowly. Oh!"

Afraid of choking her, Xiang Shaolong gently poured the wine into her small mouth and drank from her cup at the same time.

After the cups have been emptied, Xiang Shaolong switched the cups on the table and wiped his lips of any remaining wine. He laughed, "Great! In the future, no matter what I have to do for Empress, it will all be worth it."

Empress Jing seldom drank an entire cup of wine in one go. With the effects of alcohol taking over, two red patches appeared on the cheeks of her smooth and well-defined face. She took out a silk handkerchief and covered her face with her sleeve and wiped away the remaining wine from her lips.

Lowering her sleeve, she batted an eye at Xiang Shaolong protesting, "I had not drunk wine in such a rush for a long time. You are really ... Oh!"

Xiang Shaolong took the chance to sit down right beside her. He is most afraid that she will slip away and some other guy will benefit from her present state. He interrupted, "Does Empress enjoy drinking in the past?"

For a while, there is a sense of loss in her eyes like she is recalling a sad incident. Sighing softly and yet maintaining her silence, her eyes turned frosty and revealed poisonous anger.

Xiang Shaolong remembered that she had an affair with Prince Xinling. He guessed that their love must have transformed into hate. Therefore, she had that interesting expression.

He had no inkling about the potency of Han Chuang's aphrodisiac or how long it takes for the drug to take effect. He also did not know what the symptoms of the drug taking effect are. Full of questions, he kept quiet.

For some time the little hut is in complete silence. On the sounds of magpies playing and fluttering their wings can be heard from the garden.

Finally, Empress Jing coldly started, "Are you thinking about another woman?"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked and raised his head to face her. He tested, "Empress is brilliant. I am really thinking about women. But it is not another woman, it is Empress Jing."

Empress Jing's face turned red again and gazed at him. She proceeds to face the sun-filled woods beyond the window.

Xiang Shaolong knew that the drug is taking effect. Otherwise, her complexion will not change as easily.

Sliding to her back, he had wanted to hold her shoulders. Afraid of retaliation, he softly spoke, "Does Empress have something on her mind?"

This Queen of Zhao unhappily sighed, "Sometimes, I have no idea what I am doing. Why am I expending so much effort on an insignificant issue? Look at the trees and flowers outside. They remain so carefree under the rays of the sun. If I can abandon all my worries, life will be a paradise."

Xiang Shaolong was dumbfounded. She has just taken an aphrodisiac and should be full of passion and be begging him for sex. Why is she expressing all her woes instead? Could it be that Han Chuang gave him the wrong medication or the drug has expired and cause a different reaction? Thinking back, he realised his error.

If Zhao Mu has been feeding her constantly with sex drugs to keep her passion up, she would have developed some immunity to it. Like a common drug abuser, they need to increase the dosage to keep them 'high'. He kicked himself for only doping her with a small amount. There is no way he can get her to drink another cup of his wine. What shall he do?

CHAPTER 6

The Deciding Factor

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHILE Xiang Shaolong is still undecided, Empress Jing stood up. He was expecting her to storm out in a huff; instead, she walked slowly to the window and released a long breath, gazing at the trees and flowers. Xiang Shaolong followed her lead and leaned on the window sill, scrutinizing her chiselled face.

Although her face is peach-red, her mesmerizing eyes show that she is still dwelling on her past. Switching between

happiness, anger, sadness and pain is all alternating on her face.

Xiang Shaolong is sure that the drug is taking effect, causing her to reveal her hidden and suppressed expressions. She has even forgotten her original intention to get Xiang Shaolong to harm Zhao Ya.

This Queen of Zhao seems to be in a trance as if she has taken some mind-altering medication. Exhibiting an unusual side of her, she seems to have lost her normal will power and sense of preparedness.

Xiang Shaolong plucked up his courage and reached out with his hand around her soft and tender shoulder. "What is Her Majesty thinking about?"

He soothingly asked.

Empress Jing appears to be immune to his touch. Shaking her head, she cried, "I hate him!"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback and coaxed, "Who dares to offend Your Majesty? Hei! Do you want another cup of wine?"

Irritated, Empress Jing scowled, "Wouldn't drinking wine make me feel even worse than before?!"

She did not even turn her head and stared at him through the corner of her eye.

Xiang Shaolong has a guilty conscience and dare not incur her wrath. Releasing his grip on her shoulder, he nodded,

“Yes! If you cut water with a knife, the water will still flow on. If you drink, the alcohol entering your upset liver will be transformed into tears.”

Unknowingly, he sprouted a line from Li Bai, the great Tang Dynasty Poet. Due to his limited memory, the verse is modified and doesn't make any sense.

Empress Jing muttered, “If you cut water with a knife, the water will still flow on. If you drink, the alcohol entering your upset liver will be transformed into tears.”

Her curvy figure started to shake and she faced him with her eyes shining with coldness.

Xiang Shaolong is so nervous that his hands and feet turned into ice. He cursed himself for acting like an unrefined boor and yet came up with a fantastic line like that.

The chill in her eyes faded rapidly as Empress Jing sighed, “What a moving verse! It is subtle but yet pleasing to the ear. For so many years, this is the first time I am touched by poetry.”

Ending, her face became even more reddish.

Xiang Shaolong was relieved. He is certain that she was recollecting her past with Prince Xinling, causing her pretty eyes to turn cold. It appears that Prince Xinling has dealt her such a heavy blow that she is still unable to let go after so many years. Her tryst with Zhao Mu is likely to be a form of revenge. In this case, she must be ignorant about Han Chuang's and Prince Xinling's conspiracy.

Prince Xinling gained her true love while Zhao Mu is all about perverted satisfaction and excitement.

After they gazed at each other for some time, Empress Jing warmed up and state in a low voice, “Dong Kuang! You are a special man.”

Xiang Shaolong tested the waters by reaching over and holding her snow white jade hands. Her hands are well-manicured with long fingernails.

Empress Jing rotated slightly and allowed her precious hand to land in this man’s grasp.

Just as Xiang Shaolong is about to pull her into his embrace, Empress Jing retracted her hand. Her delicate eyes show signs of awakening as she coldly snorted, “Does General Dong know why I have summoned you?”

Xiang Shaolong was dismayed that the effects of the drug are subsidizing and this woman is recovering her usual clarity. He nodded, “Please give your orders and I will not fail you.”

Xiang Shaolong left Han Chuang’s residence and headed to Zhao Mu’s residence at once. The traitor is not at home and he left a message and head back to the Command Centre to liaise with Teng Yi. After his report, he sighed, “There are bound to be some setbacks. Now, we can only rely on military might. I thought that we can seduce her and break Zhao Mu’s sexual control over her. Who knows...! Ai!”

Teng Yi reassured, "She has not given you the 'evidence' to plant in Lady Ya's residence. When you meet up again, just increase the dosage."

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "First, we may not be drinking. Second, I am not used to such methods to deal with women. Forget it! It is better than Ya'er leave Handan City and we have one less consideration."

Teng Yi informed, "Talented Lady Ji just sent word that she has informed Xiaocheng that she will return to Wei tomorrow. From what I see, her departure will stir up some debates and speculation, especially from Li Yuan and Lord Longyang."

Xiang Shaolong could understand his meaning.

This selfish and devious Li Yuan will not give up on an opportunity that is within his reach. Lord Longyang will suspect that she is leaving to rendezvous with Xiang Shaolong.

Her leaving of Handan City will not be as smooth as expected.

Teng Yi added; "You need not fret over Yanran. I have made arrangements. Earlier, I have sent someone to move the Tian sisters secretly to the farm. Tomorrow, they can escape to Xianyang with Mister Zou (Yan)."

Xiang Shaolong is still worried, "How will you deal with Lord Longyang and Li Yuan?"

Teng Yi explained, "Lord Longyang will not resort to force with Talented Lady. He will only send spies to observe in secret. He will also notify the Wei border guards to track her movement. As long as we do not allow his men to reach Wei, everything will be taken care of."

Xiang Shaolong nodded at his brilliance. With him controlling the City Guards, killing Lord Longyang's spies is a piece of cake.

Teng Yi continued, "From my estimates, Li Yuan may resort to force when necessary. He cannot send his own men to attack her and can only ask Tian Dan for assistance. I will personally escort Talented Lady Ji and Zou Yan with an army of Zhao soldiers. We will lay down a decoy and send them to Han instead. This will take care of Li Yuan's ploy."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Yanran is not a common and weak woman. She is full of wisdom and strength to protect herself. Let Big Brother see to this. I still need you to watch over Zhao Mingxiong and company. We must pay extra attention to the men on Zhao Mingxiong's name list."

Teng Yi asked, "There is something that I still do not comprehend. Why would Zhao Mu want to get the Qi army involved? With Xiaocheng's death, he will be in power. Killing Li Mu and Lian Po will be easy, not to mention idiots like Guo Kai and Cheng Xu. I am certain that he still suspects Empress Jing and treats you like a pawn. His real trust should lie with Zhao Mingxiong and not an outsider like you. He can even blame you for opening the gates to the Qi army and

killed Tian Dan and Li Yuan at the same time. No one is better than Zhao Mu in understanding the ambitions of Qi and Chu against the Three State Ally.”

Xiang Shaolong ran these thoughts in his head and nodded, “Second Brother is right. Zhao Mu will never be satisfied with our independent attitude. But things are too complicated and Tian Dan, Li Yuan will surely have a plot against Zhao Mu. We can only react to whatever situations that arises and wait for a golden opportunity to whisk away Zhao Mu. The most pressing thing is to get Zhao Ya to leave Handan City and all will be better.”

An attendant reported that Zhao Mu is here personally to see him and both men were stunned.

Teng Yi excused himself as the guards brought Zhao Mu in. Escorting him were the leader of Zhao Mohism Juzi Yan Ping and eight other elite warriors that Xiang Shaolong has seen before.

Xiang Shaolong gave them a warm welcome and paid his respects to Yan Ping like he is seeing him for the first time. Recalling their first encounter in Zhao Mu’s residence, he guessed that Yan Ping is now allied with Zhao Mu.

This Zhao Mohism Juzi has lost some weight and his eyes are more sharper. It looks like after his loss to Xiang Shaolong, he made a lot of effort to train. Not only has he regained his wounded pride, his skills are at a higher level now.

Xiang Shaolong was in agony. If Yan Ping and his men are Zhao Mu's bodyguards, dealing with this traitor will be so much harder.

The three men were seated as tea is served and Zhao Mu's personal escorts guarded the four directions.

Zhao Mu gave a dry cough, "Juzi is my esteemed guest who will be dealing with Xiang Shaolong. He has brought three hundred followers who are all formidable people. If Xiang Shaolong did not come, so be it. If he is here, he will not leave Handan City intact."

Xiang Shaolong feigned happiness and said, "If Juzi needs any assistance, please let me know."

Yan Ping let out a solemn chuckle and commented in a low voice, "After Marquis heard of his return, we have been guarding every pass and waiting for him to fall into our traps. We did not even catch his shadow, which is extremely strange. From our sources, he is definitely not in Xianyang."

Zhao Mu interrupted, "Xiang Shaolong injured some people near Handan City and escaped. Juzi led his men in pursuit to the vicinity of Wei but did not discover any tracks. Juzi concluded that Xiang Shaolong is still in the city and is linked to Le Cheng's assassination."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. No wonder Zhao Mu is generally unworried about Xiang Shaolong returning to Handan City. He has Yan Ping as his secret weapon against Xiang Shaolong. It is fortunate that he has regained Zhao Mu's trust so that Zhao Mu revealed Yan Ping's presence to him.

He has been too careless and neglected Yan Ping this huge foe.

With his eyes brimming with chill, Yan Ping coldly added, "We have searched all the nearby forests and villages and there is no sign of him. The only explanation is he is hiding in the city under someone's protection."

Xiang Shaolong acted aghast, "Juzi's theories make good sense! Who does Juzi suspect to be hiding him?"

Yan Ping looked at Zhao Mu before divulging, "Only Zhao Ya has the ability to hide Xiang Shaolong."

Xiang Shaolong declared, "Let me send some men to watch her around the clock. We will surely find a loophole. Hai! She says I am the only man in her heart. So I am only a cover while she is really with her old sweetheart."

Zhao Mu reasoned, "Juzi has the same analysis. Let him handle Zhao Ya's supervision. If you send your men, they will not be able to hide from Zhao Ya's family warriors."

Yan Ping stood up and bade, "Excuse me General Dong; I have some matters to attend to."

As Xiang Shaolong escorted him to the main gate, Yan Ping lowered his voice saying, "Xiang Shaolong would not dare to spend too much time here. I believe he will attack Marquis within a few days. If we are well prepared, we need not fear him."

Xiang Shaolong could only agree but is actually full of misery. Yan Ping's presence will only add to the burden of his mission.

After seeing Yan Ping off, Xiang Shaolong returned to Zhao Mu and reported Empress Jing's ploy to harm Zhao Ya. He frowned, "We can easily dispose of this slut. The issue is she recommended my promotion to City Commander. In a twist of events, or because she is not there to put in a good word for me, Xiaocheng may not give me the army seal. This will affect our grand plan."

Zhao Mu is satisfied that Xiang Shaolong reported his session with Empress Jing and smiled, "When we get the army seal, we will dispose of Zhao Ya. You can delay Empress Jing's orders. Hng! I have laid my plans well and can succeed the Zhao empire anytime. The present issue is Xiaocheng's precautions. The palace guards are all controlled by him. If we cannot use trickery, we shall have to use force. Before Li Mu returns, we must send him to heaven."

Hearing this update, Xiang Shaolong understood Zhao Mu's schemes.

Trickery is to use poison. Xiaocheng will die because of illness and this is the best outcome.

Zhao Mu and Empress Jing must have been trying to poison him but they have been unsuccessful. Xiaocheng knew that Zhao Mu is a poisons expert and will take due precautions.

Force is to use the Zhao army and force their way into the palace. After killing Xiaocheng, they will install the crown prince on the throne.

This is the worst outcome as he needs to rely on the Qi army to deflect the returning army of Li Mu.

Zhao Mu lowered his voice, "No matter what, I have covered all the details of either scheme. Let's talk more the next time. You should spend more time talking to Xiaocheng. He is easily persuaded. Who knows he might give you the army seal after you chatted more with him."

Pausing, he asked, "I heard that Talented Lady Ji is heading back to Wei, even before Lord Longyang. Have you heard about this?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be astounded and cried, "What!?"

Zhao Mu chuckled, "That is a piece of great news. Li Yuan will not let go of the heavenly maiden. If he chased after her and resort to force, we can use this excuse to kill him. We can even push the blame to Ji Yanran and let Li Yuan be a horny ghost!"

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted. It is no wonder Xiaocheng dare not act against Zhao Mu. This latter does have his cruel methods that act as a deterrent.

Arriving at Lady Ya's residence, Zhao Ya brought him to the unforgettable loft.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that her eyes were bloodshot and appeared to have been crying. "What is wrong?"

He curiously asked.

Zhao Ya fell into his embrace whining, "I just had a big fight with Xiaocheng."

After Xiang Shaolong got her to calm down, she recounted, "This morning, you spoke to me about Empress Jing and Zhao Mu's conspiracy. I could not tolerate it and enter the palace, telling Xiaocheng to watch the people around him. He mistaken me for badmouthing Guo Kai and blew his top. I screwed him for misusing his talents and he cursed me for loving you."

Xiang Shaolong felt uneasy and anxiously asked, "Did you tell him about Empress Jing?"

Zhao Ya shook her head, "What is the use of saying it? I have no evidence and he will mistake me for wanting to harm her."

Xiang Shaolong had wanted to persuade Zhao Ya to leave Zhao. In her pitiful state, how he can bring this matter up? In that instance, he did not know what to say.

Zhao Ya raised her head and smiled bitterly, "It is a good quarrel nonetheless. As soon as I came home, the imperial decree came. I was ordered to leave for Daliang (Wei Capital) immediately and will be travelling with Miss Yanran."

Xiang Shaolong was mystified, "What is your mission to Daliang? Are you not frightened of Prince Xinling?"

Zhao Ya felt his face with her hand and loving cooed, "Luckily you still care for me or I'll be better off dead. My current mission is to bring the fourth princess to marry the Crown Prince of Wei. On the surface, it is to replace your Qian'er but it is really a transaction. The dowry is the original copy of Lu Gong's Secret Manual. Lord Longyang's current trip is also to discuss this marriage."

Xiang Shaolong just couldn't figure out. "Why did your brother agree?"

He asked.

Zhao Ya sighed, "He has no choice. Qi and Chu are giving him a lot of pressure. Without Wei's support, what can Zhao and Han achieve? He had long wanted to send me over but I know that you are coming back so I refused to go. Now that we have such a bitter fight, he no longer cares if I am willing or unwilling to go."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "This is great! You can slip over to Xianyang while travelling."

Zhao Ya shook her head strongly, "I want my life too but this matter is of great importance. I must finish it at all costs before I can leave for Xianyang in peace. After that, I will not owe Xiaocheng anything. Ai! Xiaocheng is not like this in the past. After Lady Ni's tragic death, he became very bad-tempered."

Remembering the exquisite Lady Ni, Xiang Shaolong's spirits took a beating and he sighed, "Prince Xinling hates you to the core and will try to harm you."

Zhao Ya kept quiet for a while and softly said, "Does hubby know what Empress Jing and I are on such bad terms?"

Xiang Shaolong guessed, "Because of Prince Xinling?"

A guilty Zhao Ya nodded and faintly remarked, "I do not wish to bring up the past. Prince Xinling still has feelings for me. That is why his men attacked the palace when they knew I was away. Moreover, Lord Longyang guaranteed my safety. He will be travelling with us."

Xiang Shaolong was astonished. "Isn't your brother sending him off with a banquet on the day after tomorrow? How can he leave before that?"

Zhao Ya bitterly smiled, "Are you that simple-minded? He does not believe that Talented Lady Ji is really returning to Daliang. He sensed that she is taking the chance to flee and meet up with Xiang Shaolong. Miss Ji does not know about this yet. Ai! Shaolong! What should Yanran do?"

Xiang Shaolong's brain is throbbing with pain. A simple departure has made everything so complicated. If Yanran knows about this, she will be furious.

His responsibilities are overwhelming and he struggles to handle them all.

Zhao Ya sighed again, "We have to be apart for some time and may not even see each other again. Ya'er does not wish to live anymore. Why is life so difficult?"

Xiang Shaolong forced his headaches aside and raises his energy, asking, "Does Xiaocheng have another son?"

Zhao Ya shook her head, "There is only a crown prince. Therefore, no matter who badmouths that woman (Empress Jing), Xiaocheng will not be affected."

Xiang Shaolong continued to probe, "Does Xiaocheng have any siblings?"

Zhao Ya was surprised as she stared at him. After a moment, she replied, "There is Prince of Wu City. Wu City is just a few days travelling away from Qi. You can reach there in two days if you rush the trip. Are you suspecting that he is conspiring with Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong's face is full of suspicions as he assessed, "I definitely do not trust Tian Dan to help Zhao Mu ascend the throne without his own benefits. If I am Tian Dan, I will not believe that Zhao Mu can control Empress Jing. And Empress Jing is not likely to get rid of Zhao's supporting pillars Lian Po and Li Mu. The best way is to tempt Prince Wu and get rid of Zhao Mu, Empress Jing and the Crown Prince in one swoop. Zhao Mu will be the scapegoat. He will then kill Li Mu and Lian Po through Prince Wu. Zhao will then be in his hands. Therefore, he needs to kill me first to highlight his brilliance. He surely does not believe that I will work for him."

Zhao Ya thought about his words. Her face changed colour and uttered, "Shaolong, you are right. This brother (Prince Wu) of mine is a greedy fellow and does harbour thoughts of rebellion. What can we do?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Regardless, Tian Dan can plot against you; we can plot against him too. Do not let anyone know about this. I naturally will have a plan to counter this. Forget all your worries and leave this place tomorrow. Wait for my news in Daliang and never come back to Handan City."

Zhao Ya bit her lips, "You are not keeping me company tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong kissed her petite face and smiled, "There are many opportunities in the future. These few days are crucial to our success and I cannot indulge in pleasures of the flesh. Do you know there are people watching you?"

He shared about the presence of Yan Ping and reassured her at the same time. He then left to visit Xiaocheng in the palace.

The palace attendant reported that Xiaocheng is unwell and has retired early. Xiang Shaolong decided to see Empress Jing since he was here.

All of a sudden, he came to realise that the success or failure of his mission in Handan City lies solely in the hands of this cunning Queen of Zhao.

CHAPTER 7

Filled With Plans From Head to Toe

[Translated by REN WO XING]

EMPRESS JING received Dong Kuang in that secluded pavilion in the imperial gardens. After being seated, Xiang Shaolong said, "Lady Ya has informed me that she is headed to Daliang tomorrow, so tonight is the only chance to make our move against her. All I need to do is find a valid excuse to head to her residence and I will carry out the task. Empress Jing, have you prepared the necessary materials?"

A poisonous look flashed across the Empress of Zhao's eyes. After hesitating for a moment, she finally sighed. "She

should consider herself lucky. We'll consider this matter to have come to an end now."

Xiang Shaolong's heart trembled slightly. He realized that this noble lady and Zhao Mu must have some sort of secretive yet effective system of communication between them. That's why she was able to find out so quickly that there has been a change in the situation.

Just as he was considering the best way to awaken her to the possibility of Prince Wucheng's rebellion, Empress Jing mournfully sighed, "'When wine passes through worries, it transforms into tears.' Today, I've been incessantly thinking about this moving line. I can't motivate myself to do anything."

Based upon all the information he had gathered, Xiang Shaolong was now capable of drawing a rough sketch of the history and person of this First Lady of Zhao.

After being married off to the country of Zhao and becoming the Empress, her task was to maintain and strengthen the alliance of the three countries. In addition, she faithfully gave the people of Zhao their one and only Crown Prince.

Everything should have been perfect, but a problem appeared in the form of King Xiaocheng. Because of his love for other men, he neglected her.

Empress Jing definitely was not a promiscuous woman. Although King Xiaocheng didn't keep a tight watch on her, she nonetheless followed all the rules of propriety, living a lonely life at court. This sort of woman, once she truly falls in

love, becomes an even more hopeless case when compared to how promiscuous women act.

The person who made her truly fall in love was Prince Xinling. The latter was just putting on an act to gain personal benefit for himself. For the sake of politics, he put on a show for her, while the person he really cared for was Zhao Ya. Naturally, after Empress Jing discovered this, she suffered a wound which, to this very day, had not yet been healed.

Zhao Mu, seeing the opportunity, used King Xiaocheng's indulgence for all sorts of 'games' to acquire a stockpile of many different medicines, which he used to arouse her sexual desire. He caused herself to wallow in wanton despair and become willing to do anything for him.

Empress Jing harbored a deep hatred towards King Xiaocheng, and in addition, she wasn't a woman without ambition. The powerful and yet subtle relationships which develop between male and female caused her and Zhao Mu to use each other for mutual benefit, spurring each other on to greater depravities.

No one can deny that Zhao Mu is a very attractive, mesmerizing man. He had ways for seducing both men and women. Otherwise, before Zhao Ya fell in love with Xiang Shaolong, she wouldn't have found herself unable to resist Zhao Mu's seductions and teases.

If, hypothetically, he, Xiang Shaolong, was able to win over Empress Jing to his side, Zhao Mu's biggest supporter would be gone, and the task of capturing him would become much

easier as well. When he thought of this, he couldn't help but let out a sigh. To have a happy, peaceful life in this era, the only option was to stop at nothing and use any methods available to achieve his goal.

Staring at him, Empress Jing said, "Why are you sighing?"

Xiang Shaolong, when thinking of the unscrupulous, underhanded tactics he was going to have to use, felt no desire for her at the moment. He dully said, "I don't know either."

Empress Jing didn't expect him to reply in such a manner. Astounded, she said, "You are very frank."

Both of them were silent for some time. After the two stared at each other for some time, Empress Jing found herself somewhat unable to withstand his scorching gaze. Lowering her head, she said, "You really are willing to listen to my orders to frame Zhao Ya? I thought you liked her? All men like women like her, who know how to satisfy them in bed."

Xiang Shaolong understands what she was thinking. He ruggedly replied, "To ask me to frame the innocent really is something I am reluctant to do. I'd rather kill her with a chop of the sword and do things neatly and cleanly. At worst, I would have to flee from Handan afterwards and in such a manner, repay you, Empress Jing, for the kindness you showed in promoting me."

Empress Jing's entire body trembled as she stared at him. Her phoenix-like eyes quivering with a fierce look in them,

she replied with cold formality, "So you have the audacity to act against my instructions?"

Xiang Shaolong used the technique of using 'soft' to overcome 'hard'. He let out another sigh. "I, Dong Kuang, am willing to sacrifice my livelihood and even my very life for you, Empress Jing. Empress, are you still not satisfied? Why is there such deep hatred between yourself and Lady Ya?"

Empress Jing's face turned icy. "You aren't qualified to get involved in the grudge between myself and her."

Seeing that she was no longer criticizing him over resisting her orders, Xiang Shaolong knew that she had already softened towards him. At this moment, he was riding on the tiger's back, with no way to get off. If he didn't use extraordinary measures to subdue her, it would be very difficult to anticipate the consequences. Zhao Ya was an excellent example of how difficult it is to fathom and understand the minds of these women, who have lived in the palace for so long.

Suddenly, she issued an order of expulsion. "General Dong, if you have no further business here, you have my leave to depart!"

Xiang Shaolong rose to his feet. Taking two angry steps away, he spoke to her with his back turned, "Empress Jing, do you know that disaster is so near that it is pressing at your eyelashes?"

Empress Jing's tender body trembled slightly. Laughing coldly, she said, "General Dong, if you are just saying

frightening words to try and scare me, I definitely will not let you off."

Xiang Shaolong casually shrugged his shoulders, not appearing to care in the slightest. "If that's the case, please allow me to take back the words I said earlier. Starting today, I, Dong Kuang, no longer owe you, Empress Jing, anything further. If the Empress wishes to take Dong Kuang's life, go ahead and give the order!"

Empress Jing exploded with anger. Rising to her feet, her lovable voice shouted, "What audacity! How dare you speak to me with that sort of attitude? Do you believe me when I tell you that I will immediately call for someone to come and pull your tongue out by the roots?"

Xiang Shaolong swiftly turned around and stared at her, shooting her a gaze filled with cold electricity. His appearance suddenly became powerful without compare. He replied, "I, Dong Kuang, have never considered life or death to be a matter of great importance. If all I wanted to do was make you happy, it would be very easy for me to ignore my conscience and just say words pleasing to the ear. But no matter who I am willing to lie to, I, Dong Kuang, am not willing to deceive my beloved Empress Jing. That's the reason why I spoke those words from the heart. I didn't expect that I would gain only your disfavor. Forget it! It's no big deal if I can no longer be the city commander. At first, I was able to carry out some things on your behalf. It is a pity that things are the way they are. I'm going to go to the King now and return to him the imperial seal for commanding

troops. I no longer wish to concern myself with the affairs of Handan."

When had Empress Jing ever been rebuked directly in such a way by anyone before? For the moment, she was stunned and speechless. But upon hearing the overbearing power of his impassioned speech, her heart actually softened. She only tightened her tender face and said, "Fine! Since you are so straightforward, go ahead and tell me these words from the depths of your heart. I will respectfully listen to them."

Xiang Shaolong secretly felt great joy. Deciding to stop while he was ahead, he disappointedly sighed, "Right now, your servant's heart is dejected and downcast. I don't wish to say anything at all. Empress Jing, call for someone to come take me away! I definitely will not resist."

Empress Jing was briefly stunned. Leaving the table, she came to his side. After her slender, beautiful face closely examined his own for a moment; she let out a light sigh. "Why do you have to be so angry with me? Even if you don't care about your own life, you should think about the needs of your followers in Handan! Even the King cannot protect you from being punished for offending your betters."

Xiang Shaolong knew that the time was right. Deep emotion flowing from his eyes, he shook his head. "I don't know why I was unable to control myself either. I only felt that if Empress Jing were to wrongly think badly of me, that I would...bah! I don't know what to say."

Empress Jing was stunned at first. Then, she let out a tinkling laugh, the sound of silver bells chiming. Stretching her hands out, she pressed them against his broad chest. In a low voice, she said, "No need for you to explain. Of course I understand what you mean."

Feeling her precious hands gently touch and stroke him, Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt a surge of desire. He comfortably closed his eyes. In a soft voice, he said, "Empress Jing, please don't be like this. Otherwise, I won't be able to control myself and will violate you."

Giggling with laughter, Empress Jing said, "Just now, weren't you acting so mean and ferocious that you looked as though you were going to devour me whole? Why are you now trembling with fear? Eek! No!"

Xiang Shaolong had waited for just such a good opportunity. It felt like he had been waiting for centuries. Why be polite for any longer? He roughly pulled her into his embrace and pressed his lips against her fragrant neck and shoulder.

How could Empress Jing have imagined that he would be so rough and daring? She thought that he would be as proper as he had been in the past. By the time she thought to try and struggle free, she found herself lost within this man's charisma and his depredations of her.

Xiang Shaolong ardently and fiercely kissed this 'First Lady' as his hands roamed across her buttocks without any scruple or reservation, holding her so tightly that she almost found herself unable to breathe.

Only by breaking down the barriers between man and woman would he be able to break down Zhao Mu's control over her. This was similar to how Zhao Mu himself subdued her. These arrogant palace noblewomen lacked for nothing at all, but it was precisely because they lacked no material goods that they couldn't help but feel that their hearts were empty. If he could compensate for this defect in her heart, it would be the same as winning her affection. His freedom of action would become much greater, with the difference between as great as that between the clouds of heaven and the mud of the earth. Although there was some deception involved, how many times had she used the same sort of seductive deception against him? To him, this was just another battlefield!

In the blink of an eye, Empress Jing began to react ardently.

Xiang Shaolong's lust was tremendous, especially when he thought about her high and lofty status, as the Empress of the nation. But, knowing that she had suffered a deep psychological wound in the past, it wouldn't do to proceed with undue haste. When both of them were out of breathe from each other's kisses, he said in a low voice, "Empress Jing, do you know about the conspiracy between Prince Wucheng, Tian Dan, and Zhao Mu?"

Empress Jing, whose body was still ensconced in his arms, suddenly trembled violently. The lust in her phoenix-like eyes suddenly dissipated. Staring at him, she cried out involuntarily, "What?!"

Xiang Shaolong's arms around her tightened. In a soft voice, he said, "Empress Jing, you really underestimated Tian Dan and Zhao Mu. Do you think that it never crossed their minds that after the Crown Prince ascend to the throne; all power would be concentrated in your hands? In addition, everyone knows that you won't be so stupid as to destroy the base of your military security by executing Li Mu and Lian Po, the pillars supporting the country of Zhao. At that point in time, wouldn't Tian Dan have wasted all of his efforts for no gain? It is precisely because they have ulterior motives that they find themselves 100% confident in their actions."

Their two bodies were still entangled with one another's, but Empress Jing had already totally recovered her normal clarity of thought. She calmly said, "Where did you get this news from?"

Rousing his own spirit, Xiang Shaolong said, "From the first time Tian Dan met me, he wanted to win me over to his side. After you promoted me to the rank of City Commander, I sought him out and held secret talks with him. I pretended to be loyal to him, to see what secrets and plans he had. That is how I heard about this secret."

A sharp light shone out of Empress Jing's eyes as she stared at him without blinking. Xiang Shaolong matched the intensity of her gaze, not budging in the slightest. A slightly ridiculing tone to her voice, the beautiful woman replied, "I didn't realize that Horse Fanatic Dong was so very skilled at deceiving people. Mmph!"

Xiang Shaolong once again sealed off her lips with his own.

This time, Xiang Shaolong stopped after only a quick taste. He boldly said, "For the sake of Empress Jing, it's no big deal if I deceive someone. But there is one thing I do not understand. The King is not in the best of health. I'm afraid that he doesn't have much time left to him. Empress Jing, why don't you just wait for a short period of time longer, instead of taking on such a risk?"

Empress Jing had been kissed by him until her entire body went limp. Panting, she said, "If I were to wait a few more years, the country of Zhao will have been lost because of this blockhead."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly saw the light, realizing that she had the same line of thought as him. No wonder she was willing to collude with Zhao Mu.

With a slightly begging tone to her voice, Empress Jing said, "Let go of me, alright? There are a lot of things I need to discuss with you!"

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought to himself that he might as well go all out. If he didn't seize this opportunity to conquer her, he feared that he wouldn't have such a good opportunity again. Just as he was about to launch a fierce 'attack', a palace lady's voice came from the staircase. "The palace servant, Zhang Jiguang has come to report that the King is waiting for General Dong in the inner palace."

The two were feeling guilty due to their sordid actions. They hurriedly separated.

Forcing herself to calm down, Empress Jing said, "General Dong will go immediately. Have him wait just a moment."

Giving him a glance, she said in a low voice, "No matter what, don't let the King know what just happened. When dusk falls, go to Han Chuang's residence. I have business to discuss with you."

Xiang Shaolong found it unimaginable that he once again lost the chance to taste the Empress of Zhao, despite her having been literally at his lips. Lamenting at the situation, he left disappointed.

The palace servant, Zhang Jiguang, led him into a sturdy building within the inner palace. In a low voice, he said, "The King just woke up. When he heard that you came to visit him, he immediately ordered me to bring you to him."

Xiang Shaolong knew that the servant had covered up his visit to Empress Jing. He immediately expressed his gratitude.

Jiguang said, "Right now, everyone in the palace holds General Dong in the utmost esteem. If it wasn't for you quickly capturing those villains, who knows how many more of us would have met with disaster."

Xiang Shaolong made a few modest remarks, before seizing the opportunity to ask, "Aside from General Cheng, who amongst the palace guards holds the most authority?"

Upon hearing Cheng Xu's name, Jiguang revealed a look of disdain. "It would of course be the chief guard, General Zhao

Lingpian. His popularity, prestige, and record of service all surpass that of General Cheng. But because he doesn't know how to curry favor with Chief Advisor Guo, he's never been given great authority."

Xiang Shaolong didn't expect him to speak so openly about internal affairs. Staring at him in astonishment, he nodded. "Palace servant Zhang, you really speak boldly and forthrightly!"

Jiguang smiled. "I speak based on my judgment of the person I am speaking with. Right now, everyone in Handan knows that Horse Fanatic Dong is an amazing hero who does not tremble at the sight of power and influence. If our country of Great Zhao had a few more heroes like General Dong, why would we fear the rapacious, predator-like Qin?"

Xiang Shaolong clapped him on the shoulder. "I simply must make a friend of you, palace servant Zhang! I'll probably have favors that I need you to help me with over the next two days as well."

They stopped talking as they crossed over the threshold of the door. Passing by two palace guardians, they entered the room to meet with King Xiaocheng.

After paying respects to the monarch, each of them seated themselves. Before he had a chance to speak, King Xiaocheng ordered all the guards to leave before saying in a low voice, "Do you have any good news to report on the oaths of loyalty?"

Xiang Shaolong closely examined his face. Although he looked a bit tired, he didn't look as bad as he had imagined. "The number of guards patrolling the Marquis' residence suddenly increased dramatically, and Tian Dan gifted him with ten giant hounds that are particularly sharp of eye and keen of nose. Aside from forcibly entering the residence, there's really no way in. If my guess is correct, someone has leaked the news out to him, causing Zhao Mu to become wary of me."

King Xiaocheng was stunned for a moment, before revealing a pondering look in his eyes. After a long time, he said, "There's only a very few number of people who know about this, and We have ordered them to guard this secret carefully. Who would dare to disobey Our commands?"

Xiang Shaolong said, "Maybe I'm being overly suspicious. Perhaps Zhao Mu is simply increasing his guards due to the critical time about to come to pass."

King Xiaocheng's expression changed quickly. In a heavy voice, he said, "The great general is about to return in a few days' time. If Zhao Mu wishes to rebel, he must make his move in these next few days. General Dong, have you received any intelligence on this front?"

Xiang Shaolong said, "He once mentioned that he will need to borrow support from the men of Qi to accomplish the deed. Based on this, I imagine he has a full and complete set of plans to allow the men of Qi to easily enter the city. Oh! Not good!"

King Xiaocheng was alarmed. "General Dong, what did you just think of?"

What Xiang Shaolong had suddenly thought of was Zhao Mingxiong, that internal traitor. With him acting as cover, it wouldn't be hard at all to sneak a group of men from under the walls through the Wu family tunnels. No wonder that Zhao Mu, when he suspected 'Dong Kuang' of betraying him, still appeared so confident and unconcerned. This really was not good at all. Although he thought of this, he dared not say it. He lied, "I believe that this very night, Zhao Mu will initiate the first of his chain-plans of attack. He will assassinate the ministers and generals opposed to him to cause confusion in the hearts of the soldiers and the civilians. I must make preparations."

This was also very much a possibility. When he thought of this, he suddenly felt very uneasy. But before they had concluded their talks, he dared not rashly depart.

King Xiaocheng's face turned white. Gasping with astonishment, he said, "Make the first strike to seize the initiative! Right now, we can't hold too many scruples. General Dong, order your men to go and capture or kill Zhao Mu. If he is going to be disloyal to me, there's no need for me to be faithful to him. No one can blame Us for being ruthless to him."

Although Xiang Shaolong's heart was burning with anxiety, he forced himself to be calm as he explained, "Highness, you are absolutely correct. That is the most direct,

straightforward way to deal with things. But right now, we still don't know how many of the palace or city guards traitors are. If Zhao Mu gets a wind of the plan and makes his move first, launching an attack in unison with Tian Dan and Li Yuan's forces, it will be very hard to determine who will win and who will lose. Today, Zhao Mu introduced me to the Mohist Juzi, Yan Ping. This extremely talented Mohist swordsman alone will be very difficult for us to deal with. When combined with the thousands of men Zhao Mu has under him, the situation looks very grim.

Upon hearing the names Tian Dan, Li Yuan, and Yan Ping, King Xiaocheng's face turned ashen. At a loss as to what to do, he complained, "Are you saying we should just sit here and do nothing until he calls up his men and revolts?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly grumbled to himself that all of Zhao Mu's resources and power were nurtured by the King himself. And now, the King wants to blame him? He calmly replied, "Although your humble servant has become the City Commander, I only have the authority to command the troops in dealing with routine matters of city security. I cannot deploy the troops as I see fit, much less command the troops stationed outside of the capital. If, theoretically, you were to give me the army seal, I would be able to strengthen our defenses and concentrate our forces within the city, while having all of the critical choke points and passageways manned by people I trust. At that point in time, we would no longer need to fear the forces outside of the

city. Perhaps we would even be able to slaughter Tian Dan and Li Yuan at the same time."

King Xiaocheng hesitated for a long while, before saying in a trembling voice, "Tian Dan and Li Yuan are important officials of the kingdoms of Qi and Chu. Do not take any rash actions before I consult with generals Lian Po and Li Mu."

Xiang Shaolong secretly exclaimed to himself that this was such a pity. He knew that the King was just finding an excuse. He now better understood why Empress Jing said that the kingdom of Zhao would be lost under his rule. If you wish to accomplish great things, how can you be so full of misgivings and vacillate on what to do?

King Xiaocheng suddenly rose to his feet. "Fine! We will give you the army seal, so that you can act with full authority!"

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly knelt down to thank him.

At this point in time, the hatred he felt for the King of Zhao had already become very dull and light. It had been replaced with pity and sorrow.

CHAPTER 8

Sufficient Evidence

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AS Xiang Shaolong rushed back to the Command Centre and caught Jing Jun and Teng Yi in a secret discussion. Jing Jun has just come in from the farm. Teng Yi has a serious look on his face. Witnessing his entry, he called out, "Third Brother, please listen to Little Jun's report!"

Xiang Shaolong had the impression that Jing Jun slipped out to accompany his pretty village girl but is actually hard at work. Pleased, he remarked, "Let's see what his observations are."

Jing Jun produced a rolled map and spread it open on the table. Although the map is slightly worn, you can catch a bird's eye view of the Qi Army formation, the surrounding forests and hills.

Teng Yi scrutinised the map shortly and praised, "Dan Chu lives up to his reputation of being Qi's famed general. Tall mountains covered his back and his camps lined up on two high grounds. From this, you can tell that he has substance."

Pointing to the central camp, he added, "A source of water is crucial to a good campsite. They are camped near the water source..." Moving his hand down to the pastures and woods between three border camps and continued, "And they have grass to feed the warhorses. If they lay appropriate formations in the woods, it will be hard-pressed to attack them even with a much larger force. There are multiple rock formations within the camp and can be used for both attack and defence. Dan Chu is more than meets the eye. We must never let down our guard on them."

Xiang Shaolong inquired, "Did we discover any tunnelling?"

Jing Jun proudly reported, "Negative. I did question the neighbouring huntsmen. They told me the mountain behind the camp is named Back-Wind Mountain. It nicely blocks off the cold wind blowing from the north. Just beyond the camp, there is a natural cave that goes deep into the mountain. The exit is a secret hole at the mountain side. After my investigations, I detected Qi sentries at the exit. It is

no wonder that the nearby Zhao soldiers have no idea about this.”

Teng Yi pointed to a dense forest beside the mountain and checked, “Is it here? Have you entered the forest to see for yourself?”

Jing Jun answered, “It is right there. The forest runs for ten over miles straight to a point five miles north-west of Handan City. For those who are unaware of the cave, people can arrive at the city border without your detection.”

Xiang Shaolong stood up, “Come! Let’s observe from the city wall. This beats talking over a piece of paper.”

As the trio ascended the north tower sentry, city guards paid their respects. Chen Shi, the major in charge rushed over to accept his orders.

Xiang Shaolong acted uninterested and scanned the surroundings once. He made an excuse and got Chen Shi to leave. Lowering his voice, he told the two, “It will be too risky if the Qi army is relying on internal traitors to open the City gates. The majority of the City guards are loyal men and the Qi army will be at a disadvantage if they queue up to enter the city. While the ten thousand of them is wasting time coming in, the border guards and the city guards can attack them on both sides. I believe that the Qi army has a secret way of entering the city. As long as they secure a few strategic locations and attack the palace, Handan City will belong to Tian Dan.”

Teng Yi is moved, "Third Brother speaks with reason. If they come in head to head, it will earn the spite of Handan's army and population. Everyone will sacrifice their lives to defend the city. The Qi army of ten thousand soldiers is insufficient to deal with such a situation."

Jing Jun imagined, "If I am Tian Dan, I will disguise my men as Zhao citizens. When they enter the city, I will dress them as palace guards. Collaborating with Zhao Mu, I will spread the rumour that Guo Kai and Cheng Xu rebelled. Zhao Mu and Empress Jing will rise to take over the court affairs. By then, Xiaocheng is dead and Third Brother is his subordinate. Other officials can only accept this takeover obediently."

Teng Yi became even more agitated.

Xiang Shaolong watched the dense forests beyond the city and plainly said, "Tian Dan will not be so foolish to help Zhao Mu and Empress Jing fulfil their fantasy. In addition, he will not trust this Dong Horse Fanatic or the Crown Prince. Caught off-guard, the border guards may not be able to return in time. Thus, he will control the entire situation. When the army is in chaos and Handan's troops are mostly the old, weak or handicapped, there will not be a strong resistance."

Teng Yi frowned, "On what grounds can he prolong his control over Handan City? Will Li Mu let him off?"

Xiang Shaolong revealed his guess about Prince Wu Chen. He continued, "It will fall to Prince Wu's responsibility. All he needs to do is to lead his men and the Qi army

masquerading as Zhao army. He can kill Zhao Mu with a good reason and even push the death of Empress Jing and Crown Prince to him. When Li Mu is back, Prince Wu Chen is sitting on the throne with the backing of Qi and Chu. What can Li Mu do? If there is an internal strife, Tian Dan the conqueror will lead his huge army to attack Handan City. When that occurs, Lian Po is busy fighting Yan and Li Mu is fighting alone. Eliminating Zhao will be a piece of cake and Tian Dan will realise his ambition.”

The sun setting the west sends out millions of rays across the wide grasslands and forests.

Teng Yi heaved a deep breath, “It is good that we have figured out the intricacies or we might be annihilated. Even when we are in hell, we have no idea what brought us there.”

Pointing to a building in the city, he proposed, “That is the North Command Centre under the command of Zhao Mingxiong. If I am not mistaken, there might be a tunnel which leads outside the city, Why don’t Little Jun conduct some investigations on the tunnel’s entrance and exit?”

To Xiang Shaolong, he enquired, “How you gotten the complete army seal?”

Xiang Shaolong patted his waist pouch happily, “Both the seal and decree are here! Let us deploy our troops now and fight to the last with Tian Dan and Zhao Mu. They may even act tonight!”

Teng Yi shook his head, "I can foresee that they are still working on the tunnel day and night. They must keep their silence when digging or they may leak out their activities. Otherwise, they need not drag for another day. The earlier they control Handan City, the better can they prepare for Li Mu's return. When we can predict the day they complete the tunnel, we can predict the time when they will attack."

Jing Jun suddenly warned, "Careful! Someone is here!"

Zhao Mingxiong's voice drifted over the stone steps of the city wall behind them, "Assistant General pays his respects to City Commander. May I ask what instructions does City Commander have?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "The King has given me the complete army seal. With such a heavy responsibility, I have to patrol personally and give my orders."

Xiang Shaolong passed the burden of handling Zhao Mingxiong to Teng Yi. Chatting for a few more seconds, he left with Jing Jun.

Leaving the city wall, Jing Jun made use of the darkness to conduct his investigations. He himself rushed to Han Chuang's residence to liaise with Empress Jing.

Both parties are racing for time. Whoever can set their traps earlier will be the winner.

This time round, Han Chuang did not bring him into the inner chamber but through the garden. They passed the rice

granary where Prince Xinling's men used to be hiding and reached a hut that is used to store gardening tools.

Han Chuang gave him a mysterious smile. Clapping his shoulder, he promised, "General Dong will understand everything once he enters."

As the wooden door was dragged open against the floor, Xiang Shaolong could see that the interior was dimly lit and the shadows are unclear.

Empress Jing is actually inside. Surrounding her on all fours are her personal guards as well as Han Chuang's personal escorts.

Under the light, there is a man who is tied to the wall. He appears to be in a daze and his clothes are bloodied and his face and head are full of scars. His body has burn marks which show that he has just been tortured.

Empress Jing did not even turn her head and coldly said, "Except for Marquis and General Dong, the rest of you can scram."

Everyone left in an instance.

Empress Jing simply asked, "General Dong, do you know who he is?"

Xiang Shaolong advanced to her side. Shaking his head, he answered, "Who is he?"

Behind him, Han Chuang cut in, "He is one of the family warriors of Prince Wu Chen. He came to Handan City the day

before yesterday. He came here to deliver weapon-grade copper to Guo Zhong.”

Xiang Shaolong was hit by a wave of realization. He suppressed his pity and asked in a deep voice, “Has he revealed anything?”

His heart could not stop thumping. If this guy refuses to say anything, it is the same as not catching him.

Empress Jing let slips, “General Dong is right. Prince Wu Chen the idiot does not know what is good for him. He has conspired with Tian Dan to revolt.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed with relief and thanked his lucky stars. Han Chuang started, “In the beginning, he is tight-lipped. We called his bluff that Prince Wu Chen was sighted in the Qi army camp that he starts to reveal everything.”

Xiang Shaolong was feeling relieved when he became anxious again. He frowned, “Wouldn’t this put them on the alert? He must people who are helping him.”

Empress Jing’s voice softened as she turned around and look at him. With her eyes full of gratitude, she said, “Relax. We will put on an act that he chickened out and dare not participate in the rebellion and has escaped in secret. Dong Kuang! What should I do next?”

Han Chuang suggested, “Sister and General Dong can return to the inner hall first. Leave this man to me.”

Xiang Shaolong knew that he is going to kill him to shut his mouth. Sighing, he escorted Empress Jing into the inner hall.

Arriving at the room where they last met; the personal guards stayed outside and even closed the door.

Empress Jing's expression is cold like ice. She stood like a statue in the centre of the room. Xiang Shaolong snaked to her back and stuck his body onto hers. He reached out with his strong hand and held onto her abdomen tightly.

Empress Jing sighed and her icy demeanour begin to thaw. She leaned into his embrace and faintly asked, "Dong Kuang! Will you deceive me?"

Xiang Shaolong can understand her position. Her two lovers, Prince Xinling and Zhao Mu, have both deceived her, causing her to lose confidence in herself.

Zhao Mu is actually ignorant about Prince Wu Chen. Under such circumstances, how could Empress Jing tell the difference? She could only believe Xiang Shaolong's lie.

Empress Jing displayed her weak feminine side and cooed, "Kiss me!"

Xiang Shaolong will not be shy about such matters. After a hot kiss, Empress Jing resumed her usual resolute self and withdrew from his embrace. Pulling him to sit down at a corner, she asked in a deep voice, "How do they plan to deal with us Mother and Son? Should we report this to His Majesty?"

After a short thinking session, Xiang Shaolong managed to arrange all the complicated issues into a single train of thought. He shook his head, "If you want to tell him, it should be done before the torture of Prince Wu Chen's man. Moreover, there is no difference whether you tell him or not. If word gets to Zhao Mu, there will only be disadvantages and no benefits. The most pressing thing is to understand Tian Dan and Zhao Mu's plot. We must predict when they will act. After they make their move, we will react and wipe out the rebels in one shot."

Empress Jing lowered her head and shyly mentioned, "From your tone, you seemed to be aware of my relationship with Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong reached and held onto her clothes, gently coaxing, "Do not think too much. Empress Jing must act like everything is normal and continue to work with Zhao Mu. Leave the other problems to me."

Empress Jing was worried, "Are you confident of handling Tian Dan? I have yet to see a man more devious than him. If I am Tian Dan, you will be the one I wish to kill first."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Now, I can feel your true concern for me."

Empress Jing's face reddened slightly. Shooting him a look, she stood up saying, "I will contact you via Ji Guang. He is not linked to Zhao Mu or Guo Kai and pledges his loyalty to the Crown Prince. He is definitely reliable."

Xiang Shaolong knew that she cannot stay for too long and he himself needed a break too. He advised, "I'll make a move first. If Zhao Mu has any news, no matter how insignificant it is, please drop me a note."

Empress Jing threw herself into his arms and softly asked, "Do you want to check out the loyalty letter name list? I may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse. After all, I am from the royal family and Zhao Mu will not dare to offend me."

Xiang Shaolong gave her a light hug and kiss, "Then I will have more confidence. Do you trust me?"

Empress Jing nodded her head.

Pleased, Xiang Shaolong left. Having her on his side is truly a deciding factor in this battle.

Before he could return to the Command Centre, he was detained by Pu Bu. With him are ten over warriors of the Marquis's residence. They only winked at each other before he went on to meet Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong is certain that Tian Dan and Zhao Mu will act within these few days. As a result, he is also busy arranging his countermeasures. He is unsure of Zhao Mu's confidence in himself. Scanning around, he did notice Yan Ping's followers within the residence. They are easily identified as they all dress in hemp clothing and are bare-footed.

If he had not be promoted to become the City Commander, or become the confidante of Xiaocheng, or Empress Jing's

lover, based on his own abilities, he will hardly be Zhao Mu's match. He can only thank his good fortune.

Zhao Mu personally came to meet him and led him into the secret chamber. He is cheerful and full of colour. He congratulated, "Xiaocheng has issued an imperial decree that he has given the other half of the army seal to you. You have complete authority over the army now and you are tasked to improve the city defences."

Xiang Shaolong modestly said, "It is due to Marquis's good fortune that I do not lead a disgraceful life."

Zhao Mu ordered, "We mustn't delay. Li Mu will arrive in a few days. We must achieve control first or we will lose this golden opportunity."

Xiang Shaolong agreed, "As you instruct."

The corner of Zhao Mu's mouth curled in a cold smile as he simply said, "Guo Kai and Cheng Xu have been scrutinizing your every move in secret, hoping to find a weak spot ..."

Xiang Shaolong purposely state, "Why not I deal with them. I will make it a clean job with no witnesses."

Zhao Mu disagreed; "I have more important duties for you. I still have misgivings about Tian Dan."

Xiang Shaolong was aghast, "Marquis is not thinking of opening the city gates for the Qi army to assist the rebellion?!"

Zhao Mu clarified, "Once the rebellion is over, Tian Dan wants me to cede Wu Chen, Guan Jin, Wu Sui, Wu Heng, Chu Zhou and Fu Liu to him. These are our six provinces east of the river. How can these terms be accepted? Therefore, I have decided to act alone. With your input, I can still succeed without Tian Dan."

Xiang Shaolong could not tell if he is lying or telling the truth. He frowned, "After discounting the old, weak and handicapped soldiers, there are only about ten thousand soldiers in the City guards. Not everyone is willing to rebel with us. How can we handle Cheng Xu's palace guards?"

Zhao Mu ordered, "There are many ways to kill Xiaocheng. You can leave this to me. I want you to use your new authority to focus your troops on the movements of the Qi army. I do not trust anyone else. Long Shan (Teng Yi) and yourself must see to this personally."

Xiang Shaolong laughed in secret. He figured out that Zhao Mu is still suspicious of him and is only making use of him for the time being. He nodded, "I will follow your orders. If I leave the city, it may arouse suspicions. Who will the City Guards depend on for their orders?"

Zhao Mu laughed, "I have the perfect excuse. I will get a fake Xiang Shaolong to make an appearance nearby. You will have the best excuse to leave and pursue him. It is only for one night. By morning, Xiaocheng will be in heaven."

He continued, "Regarding the city guards, you can hand them over to Zhao Mingxiong. He is with Zhao Ya and Li Mu

and is friendly with Guo Kai and Cheng Xu. With the both of you away, he will naturally take over your duties. No one will be suspect anything”

Xiang Shaolong admires his handiwork. If he did not know that Zhao Mingxiong is a traitor or that the Qi army is digging a tunnel, he may really fall into Zhao Mu’s trap.

From all this, Zhao Mu must have been uneasy about himself. It could also be due to his character that arouses misgivings. This traitor is only using him all the time.

Zhao Mu lowered his voice and sniggered, “If something happens to Xiaocheng and you are not around, you will not be suspected of having a part to play in his death.”

Xiang Shaolong frowned, “You are confident of controlling Empress Jing?”

Zhao Mu nodded in appreciation, “Your thinking is very thorough. For her own sake, Empress Jing must cooperate with me. She will personally poison Xiaocheng while I kill Guo Kai and Cheng Xu. We will replace them with our own men and no one will dare to go against us.”

The sound of knocking was heard.

Zhao Mu was annoyed, “Who dares to disturb me at such an hour!”

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, “It must something urgent.”

And went to open the door.

An attendant frantically came to Zhao Mu's side and whispered a few words. The traitor was taken by surprise and stood up commanding, "Follow my instructions to the letter. General Dong, please return first!"

As Xiang Shaolong left the Marquis's residence, he is very puzzled. What is the event that could cause Zhao Mu to react personally and immediately?

CHAPTER 9

Eloquence

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

UPON his arrival at the Command Centre, Xiang Shaolong's stomach is rumbling. He recollected that he hasn't had any dinner yet. He notified Teng Yi to get someone to cook a meal for him.

Instead, Teng Yi pulled him back to the main gate advising, "Third Brother, please suffer in hunger for a while longer. Your wives have sent word on more than one occasion for you to go home for dinner. From now till tomorrow night, you better be careful of what you put in your mouth. If you

died from Zhao Mu's poison, it will be a great injustice! I have got men to monitor our food and drink and place some fish in the well to test if the water is pure. It is better to be safe than sorry."

Xiang Shaolong was astounded by his advice and nodded in agreement. He took the opportunity to ask, "Any news from Little Jun?"

Teng Yi praised, "There is no better spy than him. Within four hours, he has located the tunnel. It runs from Zhao Mingxiong's camp all the way to the North City Wall. It is about a hundred metres long. Both sides are ready to be used. They are now finishing the tunnel by reinforcing it with wooden panels and pillars. It should be put to use tomorrow night."

They arrived at the assembly ground and their horses were brought to them.

Riding forward, they were escorted by nearly five hundred soldiers, putting on an impressive display.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that only ten over escorts are their own elite troops while the rest are ordinary Zhao soldiers. He is uncomfortable and enquired, "Where did these men come from?"

Teng Yi smiled, "I have sent our brothers to the various strategic locations to strengthen the power of the city defences. These men are from different departments and I have avoided using those who are linked to Zhao Mingxiong. The background checks have been carried out and they are

loyal to us. Handan City is full of hidden dangers and it is better to strengthen ourselves.”

Xiang Shaolong updated Teng Yi about Zhao Mu in a low voice. Teng Yi assessed, “With such precise intelligence, it will be easier to deal with Zhao Mu and Tian Dan. The challenge is how to kill Tian Dan, capture Zhao Mu and escape back to Xianyang.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “Frankly, I don’t think I can accomplish both of them. Tian Dan will never take part personally. Xiaocheng that muddle-headed king has cowered at the last moment, ordering me not to touch Li Yuan and Tian Dan. We need his cooperation for tomorrow’s night operations. If we have the same strength as the enemy, we will be in trouble.”

Teng Yi nodded in agreement, “I realize your difficult position. Thank heavens we still have one night’s time to go through our plans. Little Jun is monitoring their situation. If there are any changes, we can react in the shortest time. I have investigated the surroundings. The North Wall is the only entrance to the tunnel. If the enemy is entering the city via the tunnel, only three or four thousand can enter no matter how quickly they move within those hours. If we can prevent Zhao Mu from meeting the Qi people, I have confidence of annihilating them.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “If not for your input, I will be busy like hell!”

As they spoke, they eventually reached home.

Stepping into the inner hall, he saw Zhao Ya and Ji Yanran were present and chatting with Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi.

The girls saw him entering and all eyes were fixated on him.

Zhao Zhi asked, "Where is Second Brother?"

Xiang Shaolong sat between Zhao Ya and Ji Yanran, answering, "He went off to deploy our men to defend our residence. This is to prevent wild bees and romantic butterflies from coming in to pick these beautiful flowers."

Everyone is amused by his refreshing talk on the bees and butterflies and could not help laughing. The stress and depressing mood is gone immediately.

Xiang Shaolong looked over to Ji Yanran, "Yanran is aware?"

Ji Yanran's jade-liked face turns cold as she promised, "If Lord Longyang is brave enough to follow me I will kill him at once."

Shan Rou asked, "Do you want to steal the loyalty letters again?"

Zhao Ya implored, "Have you verified Prince Wu Chen's rebellion? Does that woman believe you?"

As the three girls grilled him incessantly, he can only update them on all the latest developments. After he finished, they were all confused by the complicated and overlapping issues.

Xiang Shaolong continued, "Ya'er must head to Daliang for sure. Lord Longyang has promised to accompany her so

Yanran only needs to leave after they have set off and Lord Longyang will be unable to trail you.”

Zhao Ya giggled, “I told Yanran to rest easy. You are not the City Commander for nothing. I am sure that Lord Longyang will invite you to keep an eye on Ji Yanran and capture Xiang Shaolong on his behalf.”

She bowed over in laughter.

Xiang Shaolong is bewildered, “Why are you so cheerful?”

Zhao Ya exclaimed, “You are winning the battle with Zhao Mu and Tian Dan, why shouldn’t I be happy for you! Moreover, I have a nice bodyguard going to Daliang with me!”

Xiang Shaolong faced Shan Rou in alarm while Shan Rou hurriedly pointed at her sister clarifying, “Not me! It’s Zhi Zhi!”

Zhao Zhi happily explained, “Sister Ya has to go to Daliang alone so I volunteered to keep her company.”

Xiang Shaolong was elated, “That’s very nice of you. Initially, I had wanted you to leave with Mister Zou”

Facing Yanran again, he asked, “Does Li Yuan have any concern regarding your return to Daliang?”

Full of disdain, Ji Yanran chided, “Who is he to hinder my way? All he can say are the same old stuff. I am sick of his ranting!”

Xiang Shaolong informed, "We rather erred on the side of caution. I will increase the defences of Ji Yanran's residence. Yanran must instruct your men to be extra cautious. Big Brother Wu Zhuo will escort you personally. Yanran will be a beautiful soldier and slip back to Handan City. I have an important task for you!"

Ji Yanran twinkled with smiles as she teased, ""What task? I am eager to know!"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "It is to join Shan Rou and myself in bed. Aiyah!"

Shan Rou had kicked him below the table.

Zhao Ya sighed, "I am so jealous."

This is the first time Ji Yanran has been teased in front of so many people. Her face turned fire-red and her eyes shot daggers at him but she is secretly joyful.

Shan Rou pointed at him in annoyance, "Who is sleeping with you? Hugging a pillow is better than hugging you!"

She continues to giggle and her charm was overwhelming.

Teng Yi came in and reported, "The keeper of the inner palace Ji Guang is here to look for you."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. In that moment, he realised what caused Zhao Mu to react in such a frantic manner. It is Empress Jing.

In front of Ji Guang, Xiang Shaolong opened the wooden container that is sealed with wax. He retrieves a secret

document that is written beautifully but is unsigned. There are over twenty names on the document and even states their official positions.

The first name is naturally City Commander Dong Kuang, followed by Zhao Mingxiong. The third name was a stunner as it is Zhao Ling, Cheng Xu's assistant general whom Ji Guang just mentioned this morning.

Xiang Shaolong read the list in one goes and passed it to Teng Yi. Looking at Ji Guang, he checked, "How is the security of the palace?"

Ji Guang replied, "Since the burglary, arson and murder by Prince Xinling's men, the King has held onto the palace guards army seal himself. Cheng Xu is only the person who passes on the orders. Any deployment of ten men and above must go through the King. The eighteen thousand palace guards are camped inside and outside the palace awaiting their orders to protect the palace in shifts. Defence shouldn't be a problem."

Xiang Shaolong thought that Prince Xinling has indirectly caused more problems for Zhao Mu, causing him to borrow the strength of the Qi army. He continued to ask, "What about His Majesty's personal safety?"

Ji Guang answered, "You can put your mind at ease. The King has reorganized his personal escorts. Most of them are the family warriors of the royal family and there is no doubt about their loyalty. Some areas of the palace have been restricted to a kill-zone. Whoever that intrudes will be killed

without questions asked. His food and drink is also protected. The kitchen well is heavily guarded at all times.”

Ji Guang stared at the name list and state, “Empress Jing has ordered that this name list must be destroyed before our very eyes. Not a single shred must be left behind.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly praised Empress Jing’s thorough thinking. He gave the list a second look before throwing it into the fireplace and burning it.

As Ji Guang saw the name list burning, he sincerely offered, “I am aware of the dangerous period we are going through. If you have any duties that require my help, I am willing to do my best.”

Xiang Shaolong glanced over to Teng Yi. Teng Yi caught his meaning and nodded, “I can manage the City guards. Regarding the palace guards, we have to bother General Dong to speak to the King personally.”

Xiang Shaolong stood up and smiled at Ji Guang, “Of course we will need your assistance as the keeper of the inner palace. Let us enter the palace and seek an audience with the King. We can chat more on the road!”

Xiaocheng got word that Xiang Shaolong is coming and hurriedly receive him in the hall behind the sleeping chambers. He anxiously asked, “Do you bring good news?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “It is not only good news, it is the best news. I have full confidence in routing all the traitors.”

Xiaocheng happily cried, "Have you stolen the loyalty letters?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "The King has great foresight. If I can bring the loyalty letters here, Zhao Mu will know that the secret has been leaked."

Xiaocheng is in high spirits and did not take offence. He laughed, "I am so happy I forgot."

He then frowned, "Didn't you mentioned that his security is very tight and that there is no way to burgle his residence? How did you get hold of the loyalty letters?"

Xiang Shaolong has a story ready. He explained how he used the waterway to enter the Marquis residence. He added, "I manage to contact some people in Zhao Mu's residence who are loyal to His Majesty. They told me Zhao Mu is always hanging around this particular room so I guessed that is where the loyalty letters have been hidden. Blessed by His Majesty's good fortune, I found the loyalty letters. After reading most of them, I was interrupted by the patrols and have to leave."

Xiaocheng frowned, "What hasn't this traitor made his move?"

Xiang Shaolong was laughing to himself. If he had acted earlier, he will not be tricked by me. He officially stated, "Zhao Mu is well-prepared right now. If we grab him just like that, there will be serious injuries and deaths on both sides. The best strategy is to wait for him to strike. When he begins his rebellion, we will ambush him and minimise our losses."

Xiaocheng considered his statement and nodded, "What General said is reasonable. And who are the traitors?"

Xiang Shaolong retrieves a name list from his bosom. It is a duplicate list that was written by Teng Yi before he left. He kneeled down and presents it to Xiaocheng.

Xiaocheng anxiously opened the list for a look and his face colour changed immediately. "What?"

He groaned, "Zhao Mingxiong is also with Zhao Mu? He is one of my potential candidates for City Commander. Is General Dong mistaken?"

Xiang Shaolong confidently said, "I am similarly concerned that the name list is a fake to throw us off the trail. Thus, I rummaged his most prized possessions to be sure. In the process, I discovered that he has dug a tunnel underneath the north command centre which leads outside the north city wall. This matter can be verified. His Majesty can send your men to follow my men to the perimeters of the tunnel. Inserting copper pipes into the ground, one can hear the sounds coming from the tunnel. Please issue the order now."

Xiaocheng eyed him with suspicion before speaking, "It is not that I do not trust you. This matter is of great complications. If you can prove your words, I will be relieved. This matter must be executed with utmost care and not alert our enemies."

Finishing, he waved two of his personal escorts over. Xiang Shaolong led them outside the palace and got a waiting Wu Guo to bring them to the tunnel grounds.

When he came back, Xiaocheng has finished reading the name list and was letting out a long sigh, "This name list should be correct. Except for Zhao Mingxiong and Zhao Ling, the rest of them are people that I have already suspected to have links to Zhao Mu. General Dong has accomplished a noteworthy mission. I will keep this in mind."

His ferocious eyes glittered as he commanded, "The tunnel is definitely dug for the sake of the Qi army. General Dong, please seal it at once. Next, in the fastest and most quiet fashion, round up all the traitors and lay siege to the Marquis Residence. When Li Mu is back, he shall lead the attack on Zhao Mu and everything will come to an end."

Xiang Shaolong could guess this coming from Xiaocheng. He lowered his voice, "Your Majesty, there is another important news. To gain my trust, Zhao Mu has revealed to me that he is conspiring to Prince Wu Chen. Right now, Prince Wu Chen is at the Qi army camps."

Xiaocheng's countenance changed, "What?!"

Xiang Shaolong continued, "Now I realise why Zhao Mu wants to rebel, as soon as he.... Hei! That Prince Wu Chen will be able to succeed the throne and the state of Qi will gain our Zhao territories east of the river."

Xiaocheng impatiently interrupted him, "I understand. What brilliant counter measure do you have?"

Using his most solid and confident tone, Xiang Shaolong proposed, "If we acted first against the rebels, it is hard to determine victory. The biggest problem is we cannot attack

them at this point in time. If someone opens the City gates for the Qi army, we can still win but it will be at the expense of the citizens. We have to protect the palace and lay siege to the Marquis Residence at the same time. It will be difficult to fight on so many fronts and is unfavourable to us. If we allow the Qi army to come in from the tunnel instead, I have a brilliant trap waiting for them.”

He added in a deep voice, “While Tian Dan is in the palace, we should kill him once and for all!”

Xiaocheng slowly said, “This news came too late. Tian Dan made an excuse to inspect his camp and has left Handan City in the evening.”

Xiang Shaolong was astonished, “How come I have no idea at all?”

Xiaocheng bitterly laughed, “He left by the North Gate and Zhao Mingxiong naturally will not inform you!”

Suddenly, the two spies of Xiaocheng came back and present their findings to him.

Xiaocheng is even more trusting of Xiang Shaolong. After another hour of discussion he finally leaves the palace.

As he stepped out of the palace, he knows that the key to victory is in his hands. No matter how formidable Tian Dan, Zhao Mu or Li Yuan is, they cannot escape from his grasp.

CHAPTER 10

Detailed Arrangements

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BACK at the Command Centre, Teng Yi was nowhere to be found. Instead, Lord Longyang was waiting for him. Both of them are on good terms already so there was no need for the usual courtesies. After dispensing his men, Lord Longyang commented, "I am relieved that my King has sent an army of five thousand soldiers, led by my good friend General Wei Bai Nian. They will arrive at Fan Wu tonight at meet up with us tomorrow. We will no longer be afraid of Tian Dan or Li Yuan's mischief."

Xiang Shaolong began, "I have a favour to ask of Lord."

Lord Longyang happily agreed, "Brother Dong please speak your mind. I will do my best to help you."

Xiang Shaolong requested, "Please take good care of Lady Ya and make sure she can return safely."

Lord Longyang was taken aback and cried, "Brother Dong, you are really in love with her!"

Xiang Shaolong plainly replied, "I am not sure too but after a night of passion, she promised to be loyal to me. Thus, I do not want her to come to any harm."

Lord Longyang was incensed as he shot an eye at him before faintly sighing with helplessness, "Rest assured Brother Dong! Because you asked, I will guarantee her safety and well-being."

He continues to sigh, "How is Brother Dong going to handle Tian Dan, Li Yuan and Zhao Mu?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Men can plan but Heaven can interfere. I will do my best."

Lord Longyang frowned deeply and unhappily said, "I know I cannot persuade General to abandon Handan City. However, do not forget my invitation. If you cannot succeed, please escape to Wei. I will inform the border guards to receive you."

Xiang Shaolong is moved and gave his thanks.

This beautiful man changed topic, "Does Brother Dong wants to score a big merit? From my calculations, Talented Lady Ji is pretending to return to Wei. In reality, she is rendezvousing with Xiang Shaolong. I cannot even protect myself and have to escort Lady Ya back to Daliang. So I simply cannot afford any energy or time to keep my eye on her."

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave and checked, "Does Lord know this man called Yan Ping?"

Lord Longyang exclaimed, "You must be talking about Mohist Juzi Yan Ping! Not only do I know him, we are well-acquainted. This man is good at military warfare and is a rare talent. Too bad he is too arrogant and difficult to get along with."

From his words, Xiang Shaolong can sense that Lord Longyang has sought to recruit Yan Ping as well. This shows that Wei do harbour ambitions against Zhao. He smiled, "Why don't you tell Yan Ping about Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran. This man hates Xiang Shaolong deeply and will pursue him at all costs. I can also focus on my original work."

Lord Longyang smiled, "Not only can you can focus on your work, this will lower Zhao Mu's prowess at the same time!"

Exposed by him, Xiang Shaolong awkwardly laughed, "It is really hard to hide anything from you!"

Lord Longyang cheerfully said, "I'll see to it and even exaggerated my words to lend you this helping hand. Ai! After this separation, I wonder if I'll ever see you again."

Xiang Shaolong gracefully mentioned, "Nobody will know what will happen tomorrow. Life is only a few decades long. As long as we have shared a life and death experience together, who cares about what the future holds."

Delighted, Lord Longyang stood up grinning, "Brother Dong is one in a million and so is your thinking."

Xiang Shaolong personally sent him to the door. As he is turning back, Zhao Ba had come to see him.

After a few words of courtesy, Zhao Ba revealed, "The King has ordered me to see you and do whatever I can to help."

Xiang Shaolong is glad that Xiaocheng is doing his best to cooperate with him and execute his plan. After some talks, he praised Zhao Ba to the skies.

While Zhao Ba is feeling high and mighty, he warned, "Our conversation must remain top secret! Headmaster must not let a third party know, especially Guo Zhong. Headmaster should understand his connection to Li Yuan!"

Zhao Be vehemently cursed, "Old Guo is getting muddle-headed, desiring to be the father-in-law of that cold blooded thief Li Yuan. I am so pissed that I haven't seen him for a while. General can put your mind at ease."

Xiang Shaolong starts off, "Today, we require Headmaster's help as Zhao Mu has secretly conspired with Tian Dan and Li Yuan against our King."

Zhao Ba's face changed colour as he uttered, "What! Tian Dan and Li Yuan are so daring!?"

Xiang Shaolong explained, "The King has forbid me to give you all the details. Can I enquire as to how many top fighters do you have at the Martial School and whose loyalty is beyond question?"

Zhao Ba puffed his chest, "At least five or six hundred elite fighters. Are we attacking the Marquis Residence?"

Xiang Shaolong suggested, "It depends. Can headmaster find an excuse like an (army field) exercise? Using this cover, secretly assemble your men at Lady Ya's residence. Once you enter, prevent anyone from leaving so that your location will not be leaked out."

Zhao Ba is a man who loves fighting and action. He happily consented and left after further discussion.

It is almost midnight. Just as Xiang Shaolong was deciding to go home and sleep or not, Teng Yi came back. In a relaxed mood, he updated, "Lucky we had that name list or we will be in peril. Major Gan Zhu and Major Li Ming who are guarding the South gate are Zhao Mu's spies as well. Zhao Mingxiong has deployed them there with ulterior motives."

Xiang Shaolong remembered these two names but had no idea they were in charge of the South gate. Thinking what a close shave they had, he analyzed, "Zhao Mu is a top schemer. First, he let Tian Dan's army come in from the tunnel and create chaos. Then, he will open up both the North and South gates for the entire army to enter Handan City. Their attack is focused and well-planned. Even with the

entire Zhao population attacking them, it is of little use. This is truly a top battle strategy.”

Teng Yi laughed, “A pity he is not your match. Otherwise, the loyalty letters will not have appeared.”

Patting his shoulder, he added, “Third Brother should return first. Leave this to me. Little Jun and his men are actively spying on the Qi army. You can relax and keep your wives company.”

Xiang Shaolong questioned, “This upcoming battle, we will use our elite brothers exclusively for Zhao Mu. Does Second Brother have any method of assembling a force of elite City guards and plant them in strategic locations inside the city. I want them to limit the power of the Qi forces.”

Teng Yi replied, “All thanks to your Army Seal. Earlier, I was discussing the deployment with Zhao Mingxiong. He tried to trick me with various recommendations. I allowed myself to be tricked and accept all his suggestions. Now that he has deployed all those loyal to him at the north and south gate, I am free to choose my elite city guards from the remaining forces. In fact, I have assembled an elite force of two thousand city guards. The rest of the old, weak or handicapped soldiers will be sent to spy on the Qi army as Zhao Mu requested. Better to let them leave than to hamper our progress in Handan City.”

Catching each other’s eyes, they held their bellies and filled the room with laughter.

At home, Ji Yanran had led the Tian sisters away while Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi had gone back to her residence. Barely awake, Shan Rou is still waiting for his return. She roared, "Why are you return so late! I have something to say to you!"

Due to her lack of sleep, Shan Rou is slightly not in full control of herself.

Xiang Shaolong carried her with both hands into his bedroom.

Before he could step over the door ledge, Shan Rou displayed her prowess and bit him on the shoulder.

Xiang Shaolong bore with the pain and threw her onto his bed.

Shan Rou proudly giggled and flipped to one side. She comfortably lay down and closed both her eyes. She seems to be offering herself for his pleasure.

Xiang Shaolong is in need of a beauty to soothe his tense nerves. Removing his shoes, he climbed onto Shan Rou.

She is strangely cooperative and passionate, letting Xiang Shaolong enjoy her tenderness.

After the stormy affair, they hug each other to sleep.

Shan Rou whispered, "This is our last night together. In the future, you need not tolerate my tantrums."

An exhausted Xiang Shaolong was almost asleep but was fully awoken after hearing these words. He sighed, "So you are not joking and is leaving me for good."

Shan Rou sighed, "I am in a dilemma too. From what I see, Tian Dan will survive this episode..."

Xiang Shaolong butt in, "If you risk your life to assassinate him again, I will be worried."

Shan Rou intimately cooed, "I will be extra cautious and will not die in vain. If I fail, I will commit suicide. Who is afraid of death?"

Xiang Shaolong knew that her mind is made up. He gently advised, "Do not pressure yourself too much. If you know you cannot succeed, look for me in Xianyang. Don't you wish to see Shan Lan?"

Shan Rou kissed him, "Got it, you long-winded man! Aren't you going to make love with me one more time?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "The Queen has ordered. No matter how difficult it is, your servant will oblige."

Before the sun is up, Xiang Shaolong was roused by Shan Rou. "Get up quickly! As the City Commander, how can you be so lazy?" she scolded.

Today is her 'D-Day' so she is highly excited. Under her teasing, he forced himself to get out of bed.

Shan Rou disguised as his escort and seriously state, "Today, I will break all traditions and listen to your every command obediently. However, I must be at your side all the time."

Xiang Shaolong recalled getting Lord Longyang to deceive Yan Ping. He dared not be complacent and hurriedly washed up and got dressed. In between bites, he led Wu Guo and his entourage back to the Command Centre.

It was daybreak when he arrived at the Command Centre. Teng Yi is busy like a bee but he is still as energetic and fresh. Xiang Shaolong is amazed at this Ironman.

Teng Yi noticed how serious Shan Rou looked and teased her. He then proceeds to report to Xiang Shaolong about last night's deployment, "I have assembled three thousand men internally and externally. They will be the main force against the enemy. I have analyzed the attacking and retreating routes of the enemy and I guarantee that the ambush will be successful and we will make a killing. Zhao Ba's men are an added advantage as the enemy will never think that we will have this bonus."

Xiang Shaolong added, "At that time, Xiaocheng will transfer another five thousand elite palace guards under our command. With this, we will have over ten thousand elite troops which can mop up the rebels. Divide the remaining City guards into two groups. Group A will be responsible for guarding the city and patrolling the streets. Group B will switch from monitoring the Qi army to guarding Handan

City's borders. Let Tian Dan know that we are ready and not make any reckless attacks."

Shan Rou could not help but ask, "How are we going to escape?"

Xiang Shaolong teased her, "Aren't you a simple and obedient soldier? Your general is talking and who are you to interrupt?"

Shan Rou was annoyed and pouted, staring hard at Wu Guo who is trying to hold his laughter at the side. "I'll get even with you later!"

Her body language displayed.

As relax as possible, Teng Yi held his laughter and replied, "It couldn't be easier. During the attack on Zhao Mu's residence, all of us died in the fight. Wouldn't that be a good closure?"

Shan Rou and Wu Guo were bowled over and did not know what to say.

Xiang Shaolong assessed, "Today's first task is to contact Pu Bu. Without his intelligence reports, there are many things we cannot do."

Teng Yi agreed and Xiang Shaolong continued to speak about Yan Ping.

Teng Yi joked, "He did not learn his lesson the first time round. We will annihilate him and take revenge for Mister Yuan Zong."

After a detailed discussion, Xiang Shaolong led Shan Rou to the palace to send off Lord Longyang and Zhao Ya.

Palace security is extremely tight. Ji Guang noticed them and welcomed, "The King, Empress Jing, Lord Longyang, Princess Ya, Miss Zhi and Master Guo are having breakfast. The King asked me to send you to see him immediately if you should show up."

Xiang Shaolong winked at Shan Rou and Wu Guo, asking them to wait for him outside the palace. With Ji Guang's company, he entered the palace.

In a low voice, Ji Guang warned; "General Cheng Xu knows that there is something between the King and you. He appears to be very upset. You have to be careful when you see him."

Xiang Shaolong realised that it is erroneous to neglect him and it may cause some trouble.

Although this kid is snobbish, he is not evil. As he thought about it, Cheng Xu appeared at the end of a long corridor under the escort of some palace guards.

Ji Guang gave a dry cough and stop speaking.

Xiang Shaolong waved to Cheng Xu from afar and Cheng Xu reluctantly returned the gesture. When they are nearly facing each other, Xiang Shaolong winked at Ji Guang before approaching the uncertain Cheng Xu, "General Cheng, can I have a private word with you?"

Cheng Xu anxiously nodded in consent and they left the corridor and entered the garden.

Xiang Shaolong asked in a low voice, "The traitors are rebelling. What plans does General Cheng have?"

Cheng Xu coldly retorted, "General Dong is handling this well. What do I have to worry about?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "General Cheng is too serious. I have a suggestion. If we work together and resolve this danger, it will only be beneficial to both of us either personally or officially. What does General Cheng think?"

Cheng Xu appears to be tempted but after a reality check, he bitterly laughed, "Although I am the leader of the palace guards, I have no real authority. Everything has to be agreed by the King. I think General Dong had better speak directly to the King instead."

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "The King cannot wear his armour and fight the war personally. In the end, General Cheng is still required to manage the palace guards. Let me speak to the King first and discuss with you again."

He added after a sigh, "I, Dong Horse Fanatic, am not used to an official position. After this episode, I will quit my post as City Commander and focus on horse-breeding. If General Cheng can score some merit later, you will be the new City Commander."

He stretched his hand towards a disbelieving Cheng Xu, "If I do not honour my words, may I die a horrible death and bring shame to my ancestors."

Recalling the days when they went through thick and thin, his eyes became shining with sincerity.

(Note, Cheng Xu is with Xiang Shaolong on his trip to Daliang to steal the Lu Gong Secret Manual)

Cheng Xu was moved and reached out with a great force, grabbing Xiang Shaolong's hand tightly. He embarrassedly confessed, "General Dong is more generous than I can imagine, I..."

Xiang Shaolong held his hand for a while before letting go. Patting his shoulder, he returned to Ji Guang and waved with confidence.

Cheng Xu continued to daze in the sun, amazed that there are such people who love animals more than power. No wonder he is called Horse Fanatic.

Reaching the inner palace, breakfast is over. Xiaocheng and Empress Jing are accompanying Lord Longyang towards a large group of men on horseback.

Xiang Shaolong caught up to them. Zhao Ya, Zhao Zhi and Empress Jing stared at him with different expressions.

Empress Jing is full of love and warmth while the two other ladies are full of sadness at the thought of separation.

Xiang Shaolong knew that it is not a good time to talk in confidence. He appeared in front of Xiaocheng and Longyang, bowing deeply and bade farewell to Lord Longyang.

The sadness in Lord Longyang's is not lesser than the two girls. Standing beside Xiaocheng, Guo Kai sniggered, "If General Dong visits Daliang he will be Lord's most esteemed guest."

Xiaocheng appears to be ignorant about their relationship and look over to Xiang Shaolong when he heard this.

Although he knows that he will not see Xiaocheng after tonight, Xiang Shaolong still feels uneasy under his stares.

After some fanfare, everyone board their carriages. His old friend, Zha Yuan, has been promoted to a captain of the palace guards. Leading five hundred palace guards, he is tasked to protect the convoy. When they leave the city, Xiang Shaolong will assign another group of city guards to protect them till they arrive in Wei. Halfway, they will meet up with the Wei army. As a result, safety shouldn't be an issue. Tian Dan and company will not stir up trouble and attack Lord Longyang at such a critical juncture.

While boarding, Lord Longyang chance upon a short moment of privacy and informed Xiang Shaolong, "Yan Ping has been tricked. When I told him that Talented Lady Ji refused to travel together, he left at once."

Xiang Shaolong dare not reply and bade his farewell to the two ladies. When he was about to leave, Xiaocheng

summoned him into the library and Guo Kai was left out in the cold.

After the attendants have left, Xiaocheng revealed; "Prince Wu Chen is really rebelling. I brought in Lady Li for questioning and she confessed that Prince Wu Chen came to Handan secretly a month ago. After a few days, he left. He must have been liaising with his spies."

Xiang Shaolong has no idea who is Lady Li and guessed that she must be from the royal family. Because of her close ties with Prince Wu Chen, she was embroiled in the scandal.

Xiang Shaolong is glad that Xiaocheng has personally verified this matter. He remembered his promise to Cheng Xu and added, "Presently, spies will be watching every move you make. If there are any slips, they will be alerted at once. Due to these circumstances, General Cheng Xu becomes valuable as he is not under observation. If you can secretly bestow some military authority to him and get him to work closely with me, we can destroy the enemies' plot together."

Xiaocheng was surprised, "Are you sure he will not mess things up?"

Xiang Shaolong reassured, "At least he is not connected to Zhao Mu or else Zhao Mu will not get me to harm him. Zhao Mu wants Cheng Xu out of the way so that Zhao Ling can take over his position. Put your mind at ease, my King! General Cheng is a talented man. His last mistake is not made on the battlefield. Who knows, it may even be Zhao Mu who leaked the secret of the palace tunnels to Prince

Xinling's men so that you will remove Cheng Xu from his post."

Xiaocheng pondered and agreed that it makes perfect sense. Summoning Cheng Xu, he gave him fresh instructions and ordered him to work closely with Xiang Shaolong. If they succeed, huge rewards await them.

Cheng Xu was moved to tears. The three of them had a detailed meeting regarding tonight's counterattack after which Xiang Shaolong galloped non-stop to Liu Residence where Ji Yanran is staying.

CHAPTER 11

Attacking And Defending At the Same Time

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

EVEN before he could reach the Liu Residence, Xiang Shaolong and his men had a big surprise! Horse carriages were promptly lined up in front of the residence blockading the entire street. Any empty spaces were filled with Ji Yanran's well-wishers and common folks who there to witness the spectacle.

Upon his sighting, everyone began pointing at him and cheering, "That is Dong Horse Fanatic!" while others shouted, "That is a true hero."

Xiang Shaolong can only laugh bitterly and got down from his horse with the rest of his men. Shan Rou laid down her conditions first, "I am not waiting for you outside no matter what you say."

Xiang Shaolong cannot win her in an argument. Instructing Wu Guo to maintain order in the streets, he squeezed into residence with Shan Rou.

The servants of Liu Residence have been informed of his arrival. They welcomed Xiang Shaolong and led him into the inner chambers. The waiting Tian sisters saw him and their eyes shone with happiness. Leaping into his bosom, they wailed in tears.

As Xiang Shaolong was busy pacifying the two girls, like a magician, Ji Yanran managed to evade all the attention and slipped in. She angrily cursed, "I am bored to death!"

Scrutinizing the escort soldier next to the three of them, she recognized Shan Rou.

Embarrassed. The Tian sisters left Xiang Shaolong's bosom with their eyes swollen with all the crying.

Shan Rou showed the gentle side of her, pulling the Tian sisters to a corner and continued to pacify them.

Xiang Shaolong joked, "How did you slip away?"

An annoyed Ji Yanran responded, "I got godfather (Zou Yan) to handle them. I am not interested in such activities."

She added in a low voice, "Han Chuang just notified me that Li Yuan is leading five hundred of his family warriors to escort me back to Wei. They are waiting for me outside the city wall. What should we do?"

Xiang Shaolong coldly snorted, "Relax! He is simply using this as an excuse to leave Handan to avoid any connections with tonight's event. After tonight, he will come back to check on the end result."

He went on to share about Yan Ping.

An attendant came to report that it is time to set off.

Ji Yanran got her men to send the Tian sisters secretly into one of the horse carriage. Xiang Shaolong, Wu Guo and hundreds of city guards were leading and protecting the convoy as they rode towards the east gate.

Before noon, the entourage has left the city and proceeds east towards the State of Han. The number of city guards has been boosted to over a thousand.

Xiang Shaolong instructed Wu Guo on how to deal with Li Yuan before hiding with Shan Rou in the same carriage as the Tian sisters. Together, they travelled with Ji Yanran.

After travelling for half a mile, Li Yuan and his five hundred family warriors rushed over from the west gate where they had been waiting.

Ji Yanran commanded the entourage to stop. When Li Yuan reached her carriage side, she asked with discontent, "Why is Imperial Uncle chasing me?"

Li Yuan jumped down from his horse and went to her carriage window asking, "There are many bandits on these roads and Li Yuan cannot help but be worried for Miss. Therefore, I wish to personally send you to Wei. Ai! Aren't you going back to Wei? You seemed to be travelling in the wrong direction!"

Behind Ji Yanran's carriage, Xiang Shaolong peeped out from his carriage. Li Yuan has an incensed look on his face and must be thinking that Yanran is deceiving him.

Ji Yanran's sweet and gentle voice sounded from within the carriage, "Imperial Uncle is mistaken. Yanran is sending Mister Zou back to Han before going home to Wei. Imperial Uncle, please do not send us any further. Yanran is capable of taking care of herself."

Li Yuan coldly smiled, "Is Miss Ji really going home to Daliang?"

Ji Yanran's voice turned cold and she hissed, "None of your business. Men!"

Wu Guo gave a loud reply and rode over to her carriage.

Ji Yanran calmly ordered, "Kill whoever that follows us!"

Li Yuan was ashen faced, exclaiming, "Miss!"

Wu Guo shouted his command and gestured with his hands. The carriage convoy continued to move forward while he led his men and detained Li Yuan with the family warriors.

Mad with anger, Li Yuan flew up his horse and swore, "Even if your King sees me, he has to show me some courtesy and respect. Who dares to block my way?!"

Wu Guo cannot be bothered with his antics and icily challenged, "Feel free to try your luck. But if you continue to follow us, do not blame my weapon for being merciless."

Li Yuan is so incensed that his face is turning red. He could see that Wu Guo is very determined and his army is twice as big as his own. He has no confidence of winning. After Ji Yanran and the carriages have gone far, Wu Guo yelled a new command and chased the entourage with his army, leaving Li Yuan and his men dazed at the same spot, watching the dust kicked up by the galloping horses.

Out of a sudden, Li Yuan knew that he has lost this top beauty forever.

Initially, there are grasslands on the two sides of the official road to Han. After an hour on the road, the grasslands are replaced by forests. Hugging the Tian sisters, Xiang Shaolong coaxed, "Be obedient and listen to Mister Zou on the road. Very soon, both of you will be back at Xianyang. From then on, we can live happily together!"

The two girls held their tears and nodded in consent.

As he spoke, the horse carriages began to slow down and came to a complete stop eventually.

Xiang Shaolong and Shan Rou got out of their carriage. Under Wu Guo's cover, Ji Yanran is now disguised as an escort soldier and got out of her carriage as well.

Xiang Shaolong went over to Zou Yan's side and wished, "Mister, please take care."

Opening the curtains, Zou Yan laughed, "There is nothing under the sky that cannot be accomplished by you."

The entourage started to move off again under the leadership of another elite brother. Another fifty elite brothers continue to protect the carriages back to Xianyang.

Xiang Shaolong has prepared all the necessary travel documents for them. Without needing to go through Han, they can easily cross the border between Zhao and Qin. As long as they avoid the military passes, they can return to Xianyang effortlessly.

Even in the 21st century, it is easy to enter a country illegally. In this age where the land is plentiful and the population is small, it is not worth mentioning how simple it can be for people to move around.

Under Wu Guo's command, the remaining army of one thousand city guards entered the thick forest and based themselves in various strategic points.

They had barely concealed themselves when Wu Zhou appeared and reported, "Third brother's guess is correct. Yan Ping was tricked when Yanran unexpectedly exited

Handan City via the east gate. They are trying the best to rush here and should be arriving soon.”

Ji Yanran laughed, “In their wildest dreams, they will never imagine that they will be attacked by the Zhao army with the consent of Xiaocheng.”

Shan Rou asked, “Did Li Yuan return to Handan City?”

Wu Zhuo smiled, “He left for the Qi army camp but got ten over spies to continue to follow Yanran. I have killed all of them.”

Sounds of urgent hoof beats can be heard from the grasslands. Xiang Shaolong swore in a deep voice, “We will not hold back and kill every single one of them.”

Wu Zhuo reassured, “Relax! We have one thousand men against three hundred of them. Moreover, we have the element of surprise. They have no chance of surviving. Even if anyone manages to get away, they will still be killed if they go back to Handan City.”

“They’re here!” Shan Rou signalled.

Wu Zhuo left their company and gave fresh instructions.

Everyone prepared their strong bows and their sharp arrows. Hiding in the forest, they await Yan Ping and his Mohist followers.

Ji Yanran whispered into his ears with delight, “My torment is over. From today onwards, I will fight alongside hubby and share every joy and sorrow until our deaths.”

Xiang Shaolong has gained her true love and replied with sweet words. Grateful for her love, he did not hold back and kissed her pretty face.

With the sun high above them, the landscape shone like a scene from a movie.

A huge troop of riders came into their view, stirring up clouds of dust.

When all of them entered the ambush area, a horn sounded and a thousand arrows left their strong bows and shot out like rain towards the enemy. Men and horses alike began to tumble down and there was blood and flesh everywhere. In this first attack, over half of the enemies were felled from their horses.

After the second volley of arrows, there was nobody on horseback any more.

More than half of Yan Ping's men had been killed by now. Their forces were in a state of disarray and panic.

Xiang Shaolong knew that this is best time. Pulling out Bloodwave, he charged at the enemies. Shan Rou and Ji Yanran were like two tigresses on his left and right, killing whoever that is in their way.

A peaceful forest has transformed into a slaughterhouse.

The city guards have been specially trained by Teng Yi day and night. Every Zhao citizen admires a hero. Everyone is bravely using a shield to protect themselves and viciously attacking the enemy with lances and heavy swords. Although

the Mohist warriors are highly-skilled, they have lost their morale and most of them are injured. With the smaller numbers, how can they withstand their attacks?

Xiang Shaolong evaded a thrust of an enemy sword and flipped his wrist, chopping down on the attacker. He caught sight of Yan Ping under the protection of several of his followers. They were trying the best to retreat into the centre of the forest to escape from the City guards.

Energised by the thought of Yuan Zong's revenge, Xiang Shaolong signalled to the two girls and charged forward like a wild tiger, chopping down at the outermost man surrounding Yan Ping.

The man forcefully met his chop and was shaken by the strong arm strength behind Xiang Shaolong's sword. His entire arm went numb and he staggered to hold onto his sword. Shan Rou took this break to kill him with a strike of her long sword.

On the other side was Ji Yanran. Unlike her usual gentle self, Ji Yanran let out a shrill cry and advanced with her sword flashing with brilliance. Another two men were felled by her.

Xiang Shaolong broke the sword of another man and sent him off with a flying kick and turned to face Yan Ping.

Yan Ping roared, "Dong Kuang! What the hel is going on?!"

In this sentence, another three of Yan Ping's men fell down with their clothes soaked with blood, showing the intensity of the fight.

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Juzi does not know what is good for him. The King has ordered me to kill you for conspiring with Zhao Mu."

Yan Ping defended himself from the two swords on his left and right. He then realised that he is the only one standing from his side. Fully surrounded on all sides, he knows that his time is up. He roared, "Dong Kuang! If you are a hero, kill me with your own sword in a duel!"

Xiang Shaolong agreed to his ploy and got his men to step back. Raising his sword, he promised, "Let me grant your death wish!"

His sword flashing, he zoomed forward like a wild madman.

Yan Ping is exhausted and cannot handle his strong blows. Whenever their blades meet, he will step back to maintain his balance.

Out of a sudden, Xiang Shaolong stood completely still and is his hands, Bloodwave is vibrating slightly. Everyone present can sense that he is at one with his sword and the forest is filled with his killing aura.

After all, Yan Ping is a master swordsman. Taking this chance to catch his breath, he advanced and swept over with his sword. The sharp whistling of the sword as it cuts through the air penetrates the ears of everyone.

Xiang Shaolong is aware of his swordplay and remains calm. He counter attacked with the third supreme killing skill of Mozi – Attacking and Defending at the same time.

In their last duel, Yan Ping lost out to this stroke.

It may be due to Yuan Zong's divine intervention. When Yan Ping saw this move, he felt somewhat familiar. His spirit is shaken and he seemed to have guessed that Dong Horse Fanatic is in fact Xiang Shaolong. When he was about to call out, a white flash of Xiang Shaolong's sword sped towards him, crushing him like a brick wall.

Yan Ping held his tongue and defended himself. Just as he barely deflected the blow, he felt great pain in his stomach. Xiang Shaolong has taken the opportunity to kneel him in the stomach.

Yan Ping steadied himself and did not retreat. Gritting his teeth, he attacked Xiang Shaolong without any reservations.

Xiang Shaolong had a good laugh and deflected the blow. "Dang!"

A loud noise was made when the weapons clashed and rang in everyone's ears.

Making use of this opening, Bloodwave shot forward like lightning and embedded itself in Yan Ping's chest.

Yan Ping's sword fell to the ground and he in shaking uncontrollably. He cannot believe his own eyes. Buried in his chest is the enemy's sword and fresh blood is pouring out from his wound. He groaned, "You are..."

Xiang Shaolong could not afford to have him call out his real name. He replied in a low voice, "This is for Yuan Zong!"

He ferociously pulled out his long sword.

The forest is full of cheering and morale is sky high.

As Yan Ping fell down in front of him, Xiang Shaolong looked up to heaven and silently prayed, "Brother Yuan! If you can hear me, you can rest in peace now."

In his heart, he is feeling ironic. He has completely uprooted the Mohist organization from Zhao. Will it really make Yuan Zong happy?

When Xiang Shaolong is back at the Command Centre, there is only an hour to sunset. Every street is peaceful and on the surface, one cannot sense the turbulent and rough undercurrents.

Everybody gathered in the quiet army study to listen to Teng Yi's latest update.

Teng Yi started with Pu Bu and has successfully communicated with him to act according to the grand plan. He added, "There are a lot of redeployments among the city guards. I purposely messed things up but actually, only Zhao Mingxiong's army is in a mess. Our men have already been assembled at the strategic locations. I have also purposely situated huge numbers of our soldiers outside the city. Besides myself, there is no one who knows what is going on."

Ji Yanran laughed, "With Second Brother in charge, everyone can put their mind at ease."

Teng Yi described, "When the sky is dark, we will take immediate action and capture all the rebel leaders. Using Third Brother's appearance as an excuse, we will impose a city-wide curfew so as to avoid harming any innocent citizens."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "When am I supposed to appear?"

Everyone was tickled and had a good laugh.

Teng Yi laughed, "Jing Jun has a clear picture of the North tunnel. Zhao Mingxiong has removed all the city guards at the tunnel exit and replaced them with his personal escort guards. He is sitting alone in the North Command Centre. Even if we killed him, cooked him and finished eating him, none of his men will have the slightest idea."

In these ancient times, the City gates are of utmost military importance. The city gates will also house barracks, offices of military leaders and Command Centres. They are well-defended at all times.

Handan City's biggest Command Centre is situated at the East gate which is where they are based at.

Xiang Shaolong enquired, "What news does Little Jun has?"

Teng Yi answered, "After lunch, the Qi army has started to move through the cave in Back Wind Mountain and secretly entered the forest. Little Jun dare not enter the forest to spy as it is too risky. However, we can imagine that at nightfall, Zhao Mingxiong will cover their advance. The Qi army will

first cross the moat and enter Handan City through the tunnel.”

Ji Yanran joked, “If the Qi army discovered that their cover is actually our spy, how will they feel?”

Xiang Shaolong chuckled, “They should feel honoured!”

Wu Guo entered the room at this point, exclaiming, “The Zhao lieutenants have spotted Xiang Shaolong’s tracks!”

Everybody was initially shocked by his outburst before having a good laugh again.

CHAPTER 12

In complete control

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

THE huge army left Handan City via the east gate. Under the glowing rays of the setting sun, the grasslands shimmered with their brilliance.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi personally led the army to investigate the sighting of Xiang Shaolong at a village fifteen miles away.

This army of five thousand city guards is just a cover. When they reached a thick forest with adequate hiding places, they will stay hidden until night time. Wu Guo will assume

command and march them to the appointed spot where they will engage the Qi army who are trying to enter Handan City through the South Gate.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi slipped back into the city and resumed control of the city guards.

Hiding in the study, they receive intelligence reports from their spies.

After the sun eventually disappeared into the horizon of this ancient city, Handan City is soon filled with lights and everything is as per normal.

When Xiaocheng got word of Xiang Shaolong's sighting, he acted accordingly to the plan and commanded Zhao Mingxiong to assume Xiang Shaolong's responsibilities at the Command Centre. Cheng Xu and the palace guards went on to impose a city-wide curfew. Everyone knew that Xiaocheng is terrified of Xiang Shaolong and no one suspected that it is a ploy.

From this moment, Zhao Mu is cut off from the outside world. Neither Zhao Mingxiong nor anyone could communicate with him.

Zhao Mingxiong did not suspect foul play as he led hundreds of his personal escorts to the main Command Centre. When he stepped into the main hall, he was surprised that all of his escorts have been locked out. With a 'Bang!' the huge door was closed behind him.

Zhao Mingxiong was alarmed and he cried, "What is going on!?"

The city guards on two sides walked towards him in one smooth movement. Lowering their lances, they held him in position.

On the other side of the door, bows were heard firing and tragic shouting can be heard.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi came out from a side door and faced him.

Zhao Mingxiong's face is drained of any colour. He angrily yelled, "General Dong! Why are you making things difficult for me? I did not commit any wrongdoings!"

Teng Yi coldly hissed, "Does conspiring with Zhao Mu to rebel count as a wrongdoing?"

Zhao Mingxiong's expression became more deathly white. His voice shook, "How dare you slander me!"

Adopting a sit-and-wait attitude, Xiang Shaolong interrogated, "A grand tunnel was newly constructed right under your command centre. Don't tell me you know nothing about it!"

Zhao Mingxiong thought of his pretty wife and his lovely son at home. Both his legs turned soft and he kneeled down.

Teng Yi detested men without backbone. He called, "Tie him up!"

The city guards put their weapons aside and surged forward, tying him up.

Xiang Shaolong went up to this kneeling figure and promised, "If you will obediently cooperate with me, I will spare your life and send you and your family away from Handan City. If I speak a word of untruth, I will die a tragic death."

Zhao Mingxiong was trembling and raised his head, disbelieving what he had just heard from this towering god-like hero.

Teng Yi cautioned, "But you must first tell us how to communicate with Zhao Mu. Once we verified your information, we will send you out from the east gate and supply you with horses, provisions and travel documents. Men! Open the door!"

As the giant door opened, Zhao Mingxiong's entire household of over a hundred people was herded into the hall. His immediate family and servants were all present and panic is written on their faces. Amazingly, they were all dressed in travelling attire and carrying their own luggage.

Zhao Mingxiong is extremely touched. He gratefully thanked, "I do not know how to repay you. I am convinced to carry out all your orders."

Xiang Shaolong knew that he has won the psychological battle and ordered, "Release Brother Zhao at once!"

The ropes binding Zhao Mingxiong were severed immediately.

Zhao Mingxiong stood up and Teng Yi smiled, "Escort Madam Zhao, Young Master Zhao and the rest into the horse carriages first and send them into the forests outside the city first. Do not be impolite and cause any worry to Madam."

The City guards received the order and herd the Zhao family out.

Xiang Shaolong took out the travel documents he had prepared and handed them to Zhao Mingxiong. He sincerely advised, "Handan City will be in peril in these coming days. As long as Brother Zhao can travel day and night, he can leave Zhao and spend his remaining days in peace. Brother Zhao surely knows this better than me."

Zhao Mingxiong is moved to tears, "I will tell you everything I know."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi smiled at each other. With the full cooperation of Zhao Mingxiong who is knowledgeable about Zhao Mu's rebellion plans, the Qi army and Zhao Mu will fall into their well-planned trap.

Accompanied by Xiang Shaolong and his men, Zhao Mingxiong made his way to the North Command Centre. Gathering all his conspirators in the main hall, he proclaimed his new loyalty to Xiang Shaolong.

These men knew that their rebellion has failed. Kneeling all over the place, they beg for forgiveness.

Xiang Shaolong announced, "If you can accumulate merits to atone your sins, I will not inform the King of your betrayal. No one will know about this. However, you must follow my instructions with absolute obedience. Otherwise, you will lose your head and cause trouble to your household."

Everyone hurriedly pledged their loyalty.

Earlier as they rode to the north gate, Zhao Mingxiong had divulged everything about the entire rebellion scheme. With the north gate under their control, victory is in their hands.

Realizing that their families are in the hands of Xiang Shaolong, and admiring their morale and thorough planning, they know that their rebellion has collapsed. Everyone did their best to cooperate and see to their duties under the command of Zhao Mingxiong.

Xiang Shaolong got Teng Yi to assume command of the North Command Centre. Leading Ji Yanran, Shan Rou and his elite brothers, they left the north command centre. With Zhao Mingxiong, they rode on Handan's long and lonely street. The air is tense with the anticipation of a big skirmish.

As they turned into another long street, Jing Jun and his army of a few hundred men met up with them.

The two forces merged together in the centre of the streets.

Jing Jun joyously reported, "Gan Zhu, Li Ming and Zhao Ming have been captured by Cheng Xu's palace guards. Now, we are in control of the entire city."

This is the brilliance of Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi. If they handled everything on their own, they may arouse Xiaocheng's suspicions. But if they distribute some of the tasks to his own palace guards, Xiaocheng will have less considerations.

Zhao Mingxiong saw that they were one step ahead in every encounter and experienced deep regrets. He agreed to help Zhao Mu as he hated Xiang Shaolong for snatching the post of the City Commander from him. In addition, he is confident of Zhao Mu's rebellion. Now, the rebellion has failed miserably.

Xiang Shaolong spoke to Zhao Mingxiong, "I will send someone to escort you to meet up with your family outside Handan City. When the rocket signal is shot into the sky, my men will release your party instantly."

Zhao Mingxiong shamefully sighed, "Now being able to work with you is my greatest regret."

Xiang Shaolong intimately patted his shoulder and smiled, "Please take care Brother Zhao and have a fruitful journey."

He continued to ride forward.

Ji Yanran rode beside him and spoke with complete elation, "General Dong is full of creative and brilliant strategies. Yanran is bowled over by your extraordinary abilities. I fully submit to and admire your ingenuity."

On the other side, Shan Rou pouted, "This man only has some simple tricks up his sleeve; why is Yanran so fascinated?"

Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran exchanged a loving glance and smiled with mutual understanding.

Under the illumination of the street lamps, the long streets of this ancient city are filled with the blowing of cold winds. The singular galloping sounds of the horses added to the mysterious feel of the night.

With two great beauties at either side, Xiang Shaolong fantasized that this is indeed paradise as compared to the first time he came to Handan City. Even in his wildest dream, he would never have thought that the entire city will be at his beck and call. The future of this beautiful city is in his hands.

His thoughts drifted into the future 21st century. As he is busy day dreaming, the sound of footsteps brought him back to reality.

Zhao Ba stepped out of the shadows and greeted him.

Xiang Shaolong dismounted from his horse and greeted, "Hi Headmaster!"

Ji Yanran is afraid to be recognised and hid behind Xiang Shaolong. Zhao Ba gladly announced, "Everything is taking place as planned. The Marquis Residence is fully surrounded and not a soul is able to leave without running into our arms."

Xiang Shaolong informed, "I shall have to trouble Headmaster with the attack on the Marquis's residence. When the first rocket is shot from the City North Command Centre, Zhao Mu's men will pour out from his residence to attack the palace with the Qi army. That will be the best time to ambush them. But no matter what happens, do not attack the Marquis residence until you have seen my personal rocket signal. I have special orders by the King to slip into the residence and capture Zhao Mu the traitor alive."

Zhao Ba realised that he is fully in charge of the attack. It is equivalent to Xiang Shaolong giving him full credit for this effort. He was jubilant and agreed to wait for the signal.

Xiang Shaolong added, "Tonight's password has been changed from 'The Qin shall fall' to 'Long live our King', do not show any mercy to our enemies. Wonderful! It is almost time. Let's put on our identification bands."

He gestured and his men brought out pieces of red cloth from their pockets. The cloth is tied around the right hand of all their followers.

Zhao Ba agreed to his suggestion and left to distribute the red cloth bands to his men.

Xiang Shaolong and his men walked over to a site where he can overlook the entire Marquis Residence. His army of three thousand elite city guards and Zhao Ba's martial warriors has fully surrounded the Marquis Residence and are

in full battle mode. The point of contention will be on the main road that leads to the palace.

Everyone has a red cloth around their right arms to differentiate between friend and foe.

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself, "Zhao Mu, you are trapped like a bird in a cage."

Revitalised, he called, "Little Jun!"

Jing Jun bowed and answered, "At your service, City Commander!"

Xiang Shaolong could barely hold his laughter and smiled, "Go!"

Jing Jun muttered a reply and led several of his elite brothers away.

Zhao Ba has finished instructing his men and came to find Xiang Shaolong. Ji Yanran was shocked and hid herself within the crowd of elite brothers.

Zhao Ba arrogantly boasted, "I have brought two siege vehicles with me. I guarantee that Zhao Mu's perimeter wall will fall in a few blows. By then, death will be too easy for them."

Xiang Shaolong is wary of his thirst for action and repeatedly reminded him to act according to their battle plan.

Zhao Ba has always admired Xiang Shaolong since the duel at his martial school. He did not mind the nagging and promised to follow his plans strictly.

After a few hours, Xiang Shaolong estimated that the appropriate time has come. Giving his last order to Zhao Ba to hold his position, he personally led his elite brothers towards the water channel where he and Shan Rou had used to slip into the Marquis Residence before.

All these while, Jing Jun and his helpers have been using sandbags to divert the water source away from Zhao Mu's residence.

As Xiang Shaolong was visualizing about the sinking water levels within the residence, he heard a loud 'Bang'. From the north of the city, a single rocket is shooting up into the sky and exploded into a burst of golden yellow fireworks. The fireworks continue to float down like a shower of rain, lighting up the sky in an enchanting manner.

Ji Yanran stared until the sky returns to darkness and sighed, "The Qi's vanguard is here."

A unique splashing sound is heard as a half-drenched Pu Bu emerged from the water channel.

Jing Jun hurriedly pulled him out of the water.

Pu Bu reported, "Zhao Mu is tricked. He is complete unaware of what is happening outside."

Xiang Shaolong quickly asked, "Will he personally lead the attack on the palace?"

Pu Bu despising replied, "This coward will not risk his own life. Otherwise, he need not hide in the inner chamber.

There is a secret tunnel there that will bring him out of the residence.”

Shan Rou inquired, “Are there any guards on the other side of the water channel?”

Pu Bu answered, “Everyone is assembled at the parade square and are ready to assault the palace. There is not a single guard anywhere near the pond.”

Xiang Shaolong checked, “How is our brothers’ situation?”

Jing Jun came over and gave Pu Bu a fresh change of clothes. As Pu Bu got undressed at the spot, the two girls quickly turned their backs to him.

As he changed, Pu Bu smiled, “They already knew what to do. The best thing is that Zhao Mu actually grouped them together and put Liu Chao and myself in charge. Therefore, we can attack and retreat as we liked.”

Although the Marquis Residence is complete quiet, everyone knows that Zhao Mu’s family warriors have set off to attack the nearby palace. The warriors have disguised themselves as palace guards and are well-trained. If not for Xiang Shaolong’s well-prepared counter attack and as well as reports from spies, they do have a high chance of success.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that the stream is fully diverted and the river bed is showing, he exclaimed, “Let’s go!”

Upon hearing his order, the impatient Jing Jun dived in first while the rest of the elite brothers swam after him.

Pu Bu could tell that every man is highly-skilled and expressed his admiration.

Shan Rou gave a short battle cry and squeezed in as well.

Xiang Shaolong wrapped his hand around the thin waist of Ji Yanran and joked, "Is Talented Lady Ji willing to accompany hubby to go swimming in the drain?"

Pu Bu then realised the real identity of this soldier. He was dumbfounded and could only stare stupidly at her.

This belle gently consented, "I will gladly accompany you to the ends of hell. A little cave like this is nothing to be afraid of."

Xiang Shaolong checked his time and could foresee Zhao Mu's men walking into Zhao Ba's trap. This is the best time to sneak into the residence. He sighed with relief and sounded, "It's our turn!"

Sounds of killing reverberated from the north of Handan City. It must be Cheng Xu's palace guards and Teng Yi's city guards ambushing the Qi army who are coming out from the tunnel. If the Qi army is led by Dan Chu, Tian Dan will have to lose his favourite general tonight.

Except for capturing Zhao Mu, his elite brothers are not involved in the fighting. To capture Zhao Mu back to Xianyang and not losing a single man in the process is a feat that he himself could not have imagined at the start of the mission.

Ji Yanran shoved him lightly and he snapped out of his mental reasoning. Focusing on the situation at hand, he jumped into the stream.

When Ji Yanran and Xiang Shaolong were pulled out of the dried pond, all the elite brothers have readied themselves for battle and all the crossbows are loaded.

Liu Chao and their band of fifty brothers were awaiting their arrival. Everyone is exceptionally happy.

Now, Xiang Shaolong is a world-famous character. To have such a good master, they are naturally over the moon.

Shan Rou impatiently hissed, "Hurry up!"

Xiang Shaolong was about to say something when battle cries and killing sounds can be heard from the direction of the palace. Like a tidal wave, the cries come in surges.

To keep it short, Xiang Shaolong commanded, "No one is to kill any servants, women or children. Pu Bu will lead the way. Let's move!"

Pu Bu drew his long sword and charge ahead with Xiang Shaolong right behind him.

As they turned into a long corridor after passing through the garden, they ran into several family warriors who are guarding the inner chamber entrance with ferocious dogs. The warriors are astonished to see such a large number of trespassers. Before they could move a muscle, crossbow arrows fell like rain and there were no survivors.

Xiang Shaolong's forces grouped into an attacking formation and killed their way into the inner chamber.

Zhao Mu's family warriors are unable to defend themselves and are mainly killed by arrows even before they could draw their weapon.

The servants have been posted to other parts of the residence on Zhao Mu's instructions, making the assault easier than expected.

Every human they came across was killed like chopping vegetables. The speed of the operation is beyond imagination. In the blink of an eye, the two hundred family warriors guarding the inner chamber were slain.

Anxiously waiting for news of the rebellion's success, Zhao Mu is still unaware of the impending danger. As he saw Pu Bu leading a pack of formidable intruders and forcing their way in, he stood up in panic. Under the stinging sound of the crossbow firing, the several family warriors in the same room collapsed to the floor. No one was spared.

Zhao Mu frantically pulled out his sword. Seeing her arch enemy, Shan Rou's eyes reddened and she shot forward. While he is still in shock, she disarmed him and kicked him, sending him sprawling across the floor.

Six elite brothers leaped over and tied him up securely.

Pah! Pah!

Shan Rou slapped him on both cheeks and pointed at him scolding, "Traitor! Can you recognize who is your Mistress? I

am the daughter of Qi's Master Shan. Do you remember how you wiped out my entire household?"

Both of Zhao Mu's cheeks turned swollen and red with marks of Shan Rou's palm. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth as he looked at Shan Rou in a daze.

Xiang Shaolong came to him and joyfully greeted, "How is Marquis doing?"

Zhao Mu's entire body was shaking. He furiously cursed, "Dong Kuang, you are really good!"

Xiang Shaolong plainly said, "I am not Dong Kuang!"

"Aiyah!"

Zhao Mu cried. Shan Rou gave him a hard kick and he looked really down and out.

"Wang Zhuo! I knew that you are an ungrateful traitor!"

Xiang Shaolong leisurely laughed. Using his normal voice, he states, "I am not Wang Zhuo!"

Zhao Mu was taken aback as he stared closely at him. His voice shaking, he said, "You are..."

Xiang Shaolong removed his mask and handed it to his men while instructing, "Proceed as planned."

When Zhao Mu saw his real appearance. He tragically groaned and did not know what to say.

Xiang Shaolong icily laughed, "When you raped and killed my women, did you even dream that such a day will come?"

Jing Jun went up to him and punched him hard on the stomach. Zhao Mu kneeled down in pain.

Ji Yanran shouted from afar, "We have found the tunnel entrance!"

Xiang Shaolong faced Jing Jun, "You check out the tunnel first. If it is unblocked, we will follow you. Aren't you going to remove your mask?"

Piak!

Zhao Mu received another kicked by Shan Rou and fell down. The look on his face is ferocious and fearful.

Jing Jun removed his mask and hand it to his men. Leading another group of elite brothers, he entered the secret tunnel.

Xiang Shaolong held onto Shan Rou to prevent her from beating Zhao Mu further.

Shan Rou mournfully wailed and fell into his arms and cried her heart out.

Xiang Shaolong could understand her state of mind and lovingly held her shoulder. At the same time he told his men, "Fix the two masks onto two men whose build is similar to myself and Master Jun. Then set this place on fire. Be careful not to alert those men who are guarding the external halls of the residence."

His men left to carry out his orders.

Shan Rou stopped sobbing and swore, "I want to kill Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned. Shan Rou madly laughed, "Look at the sight of you. I am only trying to scare you."

She struggled and left his embrace, her face red and awkward about losing her composure.

Ji Yanran returned to his side. Together, they can hear loud sounds of frantic killing from the direction of the palace.

Liu Chao and his men are familiar with the residence. In a short time, they have accumulated a large amount of wood and dry grass and placed them all over the place. Once a fire breaks out, no one can even think of coming in or even putting the fire out.

Jing Jun sent someone to report that the tunnel is usable.

Xiang Shaolong was elated. He got someone to stuff Zhao Mu's mouth and ship him into the tunnel.

Under his command, everyone threw their torches into the stacks of dry grass and wood. In these times, buildings are mainly constructed out of wood. When a building catches fire, even the immortals are powerless to intervene.

Before he entered the tunnel, Xiang Shaolong shot out the rocket signal.

It is time for Zhao Ba to attack the Marquis Residence.

When he reaches the inner parts of the Residence, he will discover that it has become a sea of fire. Countless corpses

will be recovered and it will be a challenge to identify which body belongs to Zhao Mu.

He may find Dong Kuang's and Little Jun's bodies and mistook them to be trapped in the fire and perished with Zhao Mu.

As to why the fire is so strong, it must be Zhao Mu who had placed these dry grass and firewood in the first place. If the rebellion fails, he will burn himself to death. Unexpectedly, he ran into Dong Kuang and his men and they are all consumed by the inferno.

Everyone in Handan will mourn him; not Xiang Shaolong but the Dong Horse Fanatic who enjoyed a short burst of fame.

If the people of Zhao ever learn that the real Dong Kuang is still in Chu, they will find it hard to believe.

With regards to Teng Yi, he will fake his death on the battlefield. Unless someone is disrespectful and tear at the face of his scapegoat, the truth will be hidden forever. The tunnel exit is at the back garden of an unoccupied villa nearby. Everyone joyfully followed the travelling directions and avoided the palace battleground and the area north of the city. Undetected, they arrived at the North gate.

Leading scores of their elite brothers, Teng Yi met them at the City gate. Catching sight of a bounded Zhao Mu, he laughed, "Marquis is indeed thoughtful to join us."

Leading everyone, he got on his horse and rode out of Handan City. He even commanded the leader of the City

Guard as he left, "Keep a close watch on the City gates. I am bringing some men to search for more enemies."

A huge force of riders galloped mightily onto the wide grasslands.

The sky is filled with stars and could only increase their high spirits. Only by shouting out loud can they express their extreme delight.

After riding through the grasslands, everyone looked to the west where Qin is.

Travelling for another five or six miles, Xiang Shaolong rode his horse up a little hill and looked back towards Handan City.

Many parts of the city are in fire, lighting up the sky.

Hoof beats can be heard as Wu Zhuo and Wu Guo caught up to them with the rest of the elite brothers.

They cheered upon witnessing Zhao Mu who is trussed up like a chicken on one of the horses.

Xiang Shaolong looked to his men smiling and roared, "Is everyone here?!"

Everyone reported that they are safe and well.

Xiang Shaolong gave a big laugh, "Then let's go home!"

He raised his horse whip and gently smacked his horse.

The war horse reacted to the smack and galloped downhill.

Everyone cheered and rode after him.

Everyone speedily rode across the beautiful plains under the glittering stars.

[Continue to Book 3]

ABOUT AUTHOR

Huang Zuqiang (traditional Chinese, 黃祖強; born 1952), better known by his pen name **Huang Yi** (traditional Chinese, 黃易), is a Hong Kong writer of Wuxia and science fiction novels. He graduated from the Department of Fine Arts of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and once worked as the Assistant Chairperson of Hong Kong Museum of Art.



In the 1990s, after the golden age of Wuxia literature, Wuxia literature was increasingly under attack by the general public and was losing its previous aura. However, the emergence of Huang Yi infused new life into the Wuxia genre.

From *Lethal Weapons of Love and Passion* (Chinese, 覆雨翻雲) to *A Step Into The Past* (Chinese, 尋秦記) and to the now popular *Twin of Brothers* (Chinese, 大唐雙龍傳), Huang Yi has combined science fiction with traditional Chinese culture (metaphysics, philosophy, etc) to create a new style of work. Currently, his popularity has resulted in some people describing this phenomenon as flurry of Huang sweeping through China.

Upon conclusion of his longest novel, *Da Tang Shuang Long Zhuan* (*Twins of Brothers*), Huang Yi has commented that he would like to follow in the footsteps of Louis Cha and to revise and improve his released novels.

Source,
Wikipedia.org

LIST OF AUTHOR'S NOVELS

(This list is based on a list found at *shuku.net* dated **15 March 2010**)

NO	TITLE	PUBLISHER (YEAR)	REMARKS
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SERIES:

• YI XIA

- | | | | |
|---|--|----------------------|--|
| 1 | 大唐双龙记 (Da Tang Shuang Long Ji)
Twin of Brothers | | |
| 2 | 寻秦记 (Xun Qin Ji)
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